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ABSTRACT

The field work for this study was conducted in South Africa in 1987-1989, before the end of apartheid, but much of the critical reflection and engagement postdates the empirical research. The project examined the role of the facilitator in the process of educational change. The research involved 34 teachers from primary schools. Chapter one explores action research as a method, attending to questions of epistemology and research methods, especially the interview process, reflexivity and self-understandings, and validity. Chapter two sketches the historical terrain and sets the scene for the project action and, together with chapter three, maps conditions shaping the possibilities and the limits for teacher development. Chapter four examines the relationships established by the researcher with teachers and how these were shaped by relations of power which produced subjectivities within discursive practices. Chapters five and six consider teacher development through curriculum development, in particular exploring how the curriculum structures what pupils and teachers may say or do. Chapter six also revisits the limits and possibilities of professional development and action research, both as a contribution to developing a critical tradition of action research in South Africa and as a strategy for reconstructing inservice teacher education grounded in teacher development through reflective curriculum development. (Contains 185 references.) (ND)

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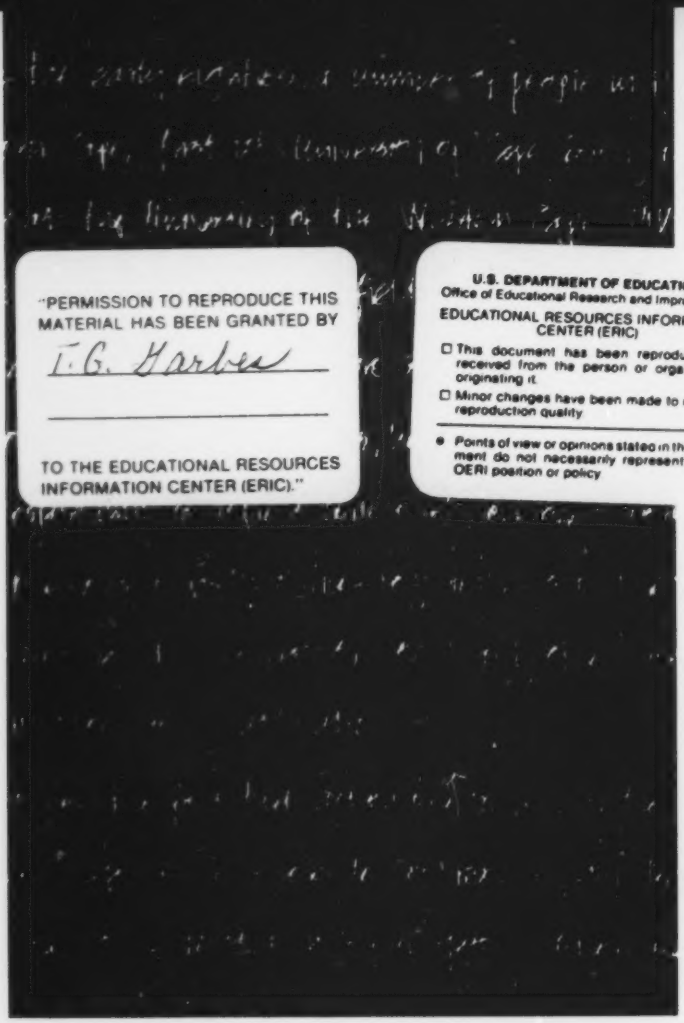

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MELANIE JANE WALKER

IMAGES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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To me [action research] is essentially an activity for pragmatists and sceptics, really. Not for evangelists and not for idealists. Because it's about the art of the possible. But we must never be arrogant about what is possible and what is not possible. So there is a sense in which we never quite know how wise we are because the boundaries of what we can change... is always problematic. And that is why we must always keep reflecting about the problem. We will always wonder whether we are being too radical or too conservative. That is the dilemma that action reseachers must confront within their experience (Elliot, 1991, p. 44).

Images of Professional Development

Teaching, Learning and Action Research

Melanie Jane Walker

HSRC Publishers
Pretoria
1996

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To Ian Phimister and Noreen Buttons

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I am above all deeply appreciative of the principals, teachers and pupils who allowed me accesss to the four schools in which I worked from 1987-1989. The thesis was supervised by David Cooper who provided valuable advice and support. Janet Stuart generously responded to draft thesis chapters as a 'critical friend', while subsequent discussion with her has enriched my own understanding of action research in African settings. Colleagues from the School of Education at UCT and the Primary Education Project contributed to my understanding in different ways, especially Alan Kenyon, Rob Sieborger, Tozi Mgobozi, Lufuno Nevathalu and Karen Morrison, while Doug Young provided support and advice as head of the School of Education at that time.

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Melanie Walker

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Introduction

The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the period of the 'old' South Africa, 1987-1989. Yet what is remarkable some six years later in 1995, is not how much has changed for teachers and pupils in township primary schools in the intervening years, but how little.

Notwithstanding remarkable political shifts in recent years and radical commitments to school feeding, primary health care, and integrated compulsory education for all, teachers' and pupils' lives are still scarred by the effects of past policies in generating and sustaining an endemic crisis in South African education. It bears repeating that Bantu education[1] and apartheid society failed dismally to meet the aspirations of African students and their parents. Especially since 1976, prolonged opposition was characterised by protracted school boycotts, savage clashes between school students and the police and army, and the widespread arrest and detention of students. The effects have been to crush a 'culture of learning' and repeatedly batter the morale of township teachers. Equally outrageous has been the wider social context (still unchanged) where malnutrition, poverty-related diseases such as tuberculosis, inadequate health care, rampant crime, and massive housing backlogs have shaped access to and success in education for the poor.

The challenge of reconstruction in the 'new' South Africa is how we might address this appalling educational and social legacy of four decades of a system designed deliberately to stifle the intellectual development of generations of students, many of whom have gone on to train as teachers. In this respect the process and lessons of my

work with teachers has, I believe, something useful and arguably even more relevant to impart now as we confront the rebuilding of educational practice and the reinstatement of the critical role teachers play. My study, on which this book is based, was premised on the argument that teachers are important in developing quality schooling for all children, and that teachers should be active producers of pedagogical knowledge, shaping the curriculum through their engagement in a process of reflection-on-practice. As Nthato Motlana has emphasised: 'I went to school under a tree at Skilpadfontein. But at least I had a teacher.'

One can either retreat from the enormity of educational and social problems; or pretend that there is no connection between shocking inequalities and what goes in schools; or take a stand through our actions and our words to further the interests of the poor and the oppressed by connecting issues of social justice and equity, however imperfectly, to our work as educators. It was this commitment which informed my own work with teachers.

Believing that neither education nor teacher development projects are neutral, I embarked, in 1987, on an action research study underpinned by a concern to build tomorrow in the schools of today for 'everyone's children' (Zeichner, 1993). As a university-based facilitator I worked for three years with 34 teachers from four Department of Education and Training (DET) primary schools in the University of Cape Town (UCT)-based Primary Education Project (PREP). My project examined a relatively underresearched area in action research studies, namely the role of the facilitator in the process of educational change. My purpose was to generate practical knowledge for INSET and knowledge of teacher

development processes, while also contributing to the shaping of a critical South African tradition of action research.

Making the familiar (self) strange

This is a book about development — the professional development of myself as an outside facilitator and the classroom-based development of teachers. Because the submission of my doctoral thesis in 1991 did not signal the end of my own learning, my purpose here is to 're-assemble' (Gore, 1993) my own professional practice as constructed in the thesis, in order to open new spaces for altering those practices. Writing this book, more so than the doctoral thesis, is my attempt to reflect further on my assumptions and perspectives and to develop clarity from a greater distance. It underscores my continuing concern that action research studies should engage the notion of critique, drawing on critical theories so that we might avoid simply recycling common sense, disrupt the taken for granted, and push at the edges of our experience.

In this I would contest the argument that in action research theorising is grounded solely in empirical data and 'experience'. Yet my view is that engaging with theory is also not necessarily opposed to the idea that our self-understandings are generated by critical self and social reflection (Elliott, 1991). I regard such understandings as certainly shaped by practical action, but equally by theoretical encounters, textual and social in action research communities. Theory, in my view, is not only what is written down.

I therefore want to argue that critical sociological, and other theories provide us with categories and frameworks for thinking which enable us to deconstruct 'common sense' and reconstruct it as

'good sense' (Gramsci, 1971). The point is to shift from immediate problem solving to the complexity of critical educational processes, where the latter may not necessarily solve our immediate practical concerns but are likely to generate new questions as we find out what we do not know. What is at stake here is the difficulty of stepping outside of one's own taken for granted reality precisely because that reality is familiar. Unpacking experience depends on the discursive conditions of possibility, not least the interpretative frameworks which mediate that experience.

Recently I read Deborah Britzman's (1991) critical study of learning to teach which further clarified for me what I find troubling in the 'myth' that experience is telling in and of itself. Myth, she says. simply leads us along pre-existing paths, makes available to us only known practices and resists explanations 'about the complications we live' (1991, p. 7). We ought then to turn to theory to politicise common sense, to 'trouble' and 'dispute' its normalizing tendencies to sustain the world as given. In Britzman's view, then, theory does not stand back or apart from practice, but engages and intervenes. But this is also not to treat theory in some reverential way. Our empirical research texts, observations, interviews, notes, and so on, equally work to interrogate and surprise theory.

Reviewing theory

Much of the theoretical engagement which follows postdates the empirical research; earlier theoretical positions have been revisited; and the thesis itself has been substantially revised. The wealth of descriptive detail has had to be edited, and readers wishing to access more of the description should refer to the thesis.

Internationally, educational studies are in a state of ferment in the 90s, described by Lather (1991, p. 8) as the 'postparadigmatic diaspora' with new languages of description being generated at alarming speed. McWilliam sums up the haste and confusion:

> No sooner have we come to terms with 'critical pedagogy' than it is 'old hat', replaced by the more trendy 'border pedagogy'. 'Critical' studies are deserted in favour of 'post-critical' in the time it takes us to generate a page, let alone a thesis. This rush to new terminology leaves the reader/writer as breathless and disoriented as any 'Tuesday it must be Belgium' tour (1992a, pp. 5-6).

Added to this, are the effects of a prolonged academic boycott which have placed many of us in teacher education at the margins of ideas which have explanatory power for our work. It is only recently that some of the analytical themes of poststructuralism and postmodernism have begun to be explored in South African writing on education (see Taylor, 1993), while curriculum theory and practice as a field of serious enquiry has in general suffered from a pervasive neglect only now beginning to be remedied (see NEPI, 1992 and Taylor, 1993). Moreover, the hegemonic Marxist discourse in educational studies (see for example, Kallaway, 1984; Unterhalter and Wolpe, 1991; Wolpe, 1991), while having significant explanatory power, has also tended to displace attention from questions emerging from relations of power, subjectivity, social space, the body, and so on.

All this is not to suggest that contemporary social theory is entirely ephemeral, nor that we should join a lemming-like rush to embrace fashionable first world ideas which may not always speak to a South

Africa comprising premodern, modern and postmodern aspects. The power of rational behaviour was nowhere more astonishingly demonstrated than in the 1994 elections, and personified in the remarkable moral stature of the quintessentially modern figure of Nelson Mandela.

Moreover, the political project of at least some postmodern thinking[2] can seem no more than unreconstructed liberalism even if now in more glamorous guise, given that 'most poststructuralist and postmodern theory takes up 'post-Marxist' positions which claim that Marxism is an oppressive discourse that is no longer relevant for the current era'(Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 26). Discourse is then the real site of politics and textual radicalism its form. 'It substitutes textual for practical political endeavour' says Visser (1993, p. 19), for involvement would entail 'entrapment in oppressive master discourses of power'. The ideologically superior position thus turns out to be a gestural seat on the sidelines.

The effect has been for some of us to dismiss the analytical power of the themes generated by poststructuralism in particular, given a wariness of explanation which displaces class and relations of production as the primary mode of explanation; which justifies intellectual disengagement and quietism by relegating political activism to the scrapheap; and which appears to prefer 'image' to 'reality'. Add to this that poststructuralist theorising is dense and difficult to say the least. Can one do it justice, as a curriculum practitioner rather than a sociologist, and avoid turning complex ideas into simplistic appropriations?

Curriculum practitioners and sociologists of education

Dowling proposes a useful way of thinking about the relationship between sociology of education and curriculum practice, although this still turns on the curriculum practitioner coming to terms with sociological discourse on its own terms: 'the practitioner must move into the space of the theorist' (1993, p. 9). Dowling's argument, while itself dense and resonant with complex theoretical formulations, is nonetheless worth grappling with for the insights it provides into education and educational research.

It runs as follows. Using mathematics education as his terrain, he develops a concept of the 'esoteric' and the 'public' domain:

> The region of the [mathematical] activity which is most strongly classified and which constitutes the subjectivity of the gaze is to be referred to as the 'esoteric domain'. Research papers in the field of pure mathematics are invariably produced almost entirely within the esoteric domain, making no reference outside of the closed world of mathematics. The public domain is the region of weakest classification. Crucially, the public domain articulates with other activities, but is structured according to the grammar of the esoteric domain which is the origin of the recontextualisng gaze (p. 3).

The critical point is that the esoteric domain positions dominant voices, while the public domain positions subordinate voices (or subjects). Put simply, the former constructs students as mathematicians, the latter constructs students as individuals studying school mathematics, thus effectively denying them access to the esoteric domain: 'In order to recruit the subordinate voice pedagogical texts

must reveal not mathematics but the interpellated subjects themselves' (p. 4) — and 'lower ability' subjects at that.

What might these concepts of the esoteric and public domains mean for education and educational research? Are curriculum practitioners to be constructed always as the 'lower ability' subjects subordinate to the esoteric voices of the sociologists? Not necessarily, according to Dowling. He argues that sociology and curriculum practice can be considered as spaces within which 'the grammar of the relevant activity prevails':

> However, educational practice is, at least to some extent, chaotic and *ad hoc*. The conditions under which teachers are called to account for their actions and decisions ... are generally such as to discourage theoretically informed explanations in favour of a kind of *bricolage* with everyday explanation. 'Everyone' has been to school, so everyone is an expert ... (p. 8).

On the other hand, the demands on sociology encourage the generation of systematic discourse: 'cases must be argued with a consistency of language and rationality; terms must be clearly defined; evidence must be methodically collected, structured and presented' (p. 8). It then follows that the sociology of education can provide a language to interrogate and analyse curriculum practices.

But, and this is important, it is not sociologists who can generate the reconstruction of the curriculum:

> This [reconstruction] must take place within a different space, the space of curriculum practice itself, ultimately the classroom. Those who can be effective in curriculum

> reconstruction must cast their gaze into the sociology of education. But this is not appropriately a projective gaze, firstly because curriculum practice lacks discursive quality... Secondly, a projective gaze cannot effect a transformation of the grammar of the gazing activity. The gaze is on the contrary an introjective gaze. The practitioner must recognise within sociology that which might organise his/her practice (p. 9).

Yet this also means that the curriculum practitioner must enter the esoteric domain: 'This recognition can occur, however, only to the extent that the practitioner has also been recruited by the discourse of sociology; the practitioner must move into the space of the theorist' (p. 9). It is thus the curriculum practitioner who must be prepared to learn the language, rather than the sociologist to teach it, or even simplify it in ways which, using Dowling's example of mathematics, would recontextualise 'sociology' as 'school sociology' (or 'easy' sociology for curriculum practitioners!). Sociological and educational practices must continue to occupy separate spaces, although the practitioner may introject sociological theory.

This is heady stuff! Nor does it make the task of the educational practitioner-researcher any easier. What it does promise, however, is greater analytical clarity and insight in mapping and understanding practice precisely because:

> ...the language and the analysis is generated within a discursive space which is other than that of the curriculum. This being the case, it is available for appropriation by the curriculum space where it may serve as a resource in the

> productive organising, interrogation, and indeed reconstruction of the curriculum (p. 9).

In short, the analytical power of sociological themes lies in making the (educationally) familiar strange.

All this of course begs the question as to whether sociologists of education are conveniently abdicating any political responsibility for entering curriculum space or prescribing practice by occupying a morally correct, because 'democratic' position (Dowling, 1993). Their task is merely to describe the absence of freedom, not tell others how to gain it. To some of us this smacks suspiciously of quietism, justifying a politically uninvolved role for intellectuals which is at best questionable where questions of equity and social justice are far from resolved.

Still, it is not my intention to pursue this line of argument, merely to note it, in so far as I believe sociological constructs do have explanatory power for curriculum practice. But for any sociologist of education such theorising is arid without access to, or even decoupled from the empirical world of schools, teaching and classrooms. Indeed, where would the projective gaze of the sociologist of education be directed if curriculum practitioners did not produce curriculum materials, nor practise in schools and classrooms?

It is to explain teacher development through curriculum development that I turn to themes which make meaning in terms of my own experiences. In introjecting the sociologist's gaze, I cannot make any claim to expert appropriation of a body of social theory. It may even be that mine is closer to a 'public' than an 'esoteric' recontextualisation as I draw somewhat eclectically on useful

analytical tools. Still, my grappling with poststructuralist themes, however inexpertly, is to recognise that, for example, Foucault's (1977, 1980; and see Dreyfuss and Rabinow, 1982; Gore, 1993) explication of power relations alerts us to the potentially oppressive role of ostensibly liberatory forms of practice, not least 'emancipatory action research'. The point is that emancipatory action research functions within its own regime of truth and can have effects of domination (Gore, 1991). Moreover, as Walkerdine (1984, 1990) and others remind us, the social domain is constructed through difference and hierarchy shapes the curriculum in schools.

Studying educational change

Threaded through the text of the thesis and this book is still my concern to identify the possibilities and limits of educational change; to highlight some of the strategies which might bring about change, however imperfect, and to consider human agency in all this. It is, then, an action research study of processes (and the limits) of change - a facilitator's development, teacher development, and curriculum development. The social space is education, the setting the classroom. It examines, in particular, a relatively underresearched area in action research studies, namely the role of an outside facilitator.

Stenhouse described two levels of action research: 'first order' action research by teachers and 'second order' action research by teacher educators (see Elliott and Adelman, 1973). As the facilitator I conducted 'second-order' action research into my own educational practice, and the teachers engaged in 'first-order' reflection on their teaching. As teachers changed, or failed to change their teaching, in

turn my own practice developed and shifted. These shifts in turn helped shape teachers' action, and so on.

White researcher, black teachers

In my study the facilitator was white, the teachers black. 'Race' cannot be wished away in South Africa, and it would be naive to imagine that it did not affect how I perceived teachers, and how they in turn perceived me. The examples which follow, taken from interviews mid-way through 1988, illustrate some of the effects and the range of teacher positions. First, David Bangeni[3] from Sizithabethele remarking to PREP master's student, Lufuno Nevathalu:

> Politically I feel there was big element of distrust that was within me. Personally I wouldn't trust a White, be it a man or a woman, who comes around and asks me about education because this system was introduced to us by them and they know how horrible it is and you can't improve on something that was bad from the beginning. So at the same time when one is asked about education, one is aware, one has got to look at the background where one is coming from. The mere fact that she was from UCT, UCT itself couldn't allow black students in their School of Education, [although] later they did (interview 27.9.88).

Oscar Mtukiale voiced similar reservations, but dealt with them slightly differently: 'I overlooked you know for educational reasons but for political reasons I'm still looking at her being white' (interview 29/9/88).

Interestingly, David raises the further question of university location, demonstrating the tortuous twists and turns generated by apartheid workings so that 'historically white' universities, even those with a record of principled opposition to state laws, are perceived as colluding in denying opportunities to black students.

Cynthia Bengu expressed her concerns in slightly different vein:

> Somehow I may be prejudiced in the sense that I feel that maybe a black person was doing the project then they would give us more advice because they are in situations which are real, they are involved with black kids [but] Melanie, I don't think she has been with black kids ... so sometimes she expects ... like when you give a lesson, she expects a lot from you ... somehow you feel its because she's white, she doesn't understand [the problems] (interview 27/9/88).

Expressing yet another point of view, Zolani Njoko from Khanyisiwe commented as follows, also to Lufuno Nevathalu:

> Because she [Melanie] is white, now this may be thought that this [teaching] method can fit the white man's kids but later we found that, no man, this is not for whites, at least we as blacks can benefit if we can use the method. Firstly we say no we cannot, because the syllabus is made by the whites. Now another white lady is coming saying the methods we are using are not quite okay and trying to bring her own methods to us. We said no her method won't work with us, but later as I was closer to her, then I found it's helping us (interview 28/9/88).

Finally, John Mzikona who said: '... what we need is the knowledge, that's all, and knowledge has no colour' (interview 29/9/88).

Zolani and John's remarks also suggest that we should not allow ourselves to be paralysed by the pernicious legacy of racist attitudes in this country, or seduced into a belief that only like can research like, thereby abandoning the political struggle over the concept of race. (Even though in this case the research aspires to be research with, rather than on black teachers.) To accept this is, as Miles (1989) argues, to subscribe to a belief in some permanent essence of 'whiteness' or' blackness', and a universal and unchanging 'truth' about the nature of racism. He is worth quoting at some length:

> ... although (indeed because) there are limits to the experience of many 'white' people when compared with 'black' people, there is no single truth about racism which only 'blacks' can know. To assert the latter is so, is in fact, to condemn 'white' people to a universal condition which implies possession of a permanent essence which inevitably sets them apart ... Armed with the notion that truth is relative and negotiated ... there is no reason to believe that the colour of one's skin naturally or inevitably prevents one from contributing to an understanding of the nature and origin of racism. Equally, and for the same reason, one can only succeed in that task if (in a society in which skin colour is signified) others with a different skin colour participate in the realisation of the objective (1989, p. 6-7).

Rather, then, might we not consider questions, as Troyna and Carrington (1989) suggest, as to how we develop greater reciprocity and collaboration between antiracist researchers and

those whom we research, also seeing the research process itself as a deliberate challenge to the racist stereotypes and divisions so common in our society. Even more important might be the principles which underpin our research, not least a commitment to social justice, equality, and participatory democracy.

These arguments which turn on doing ethical research in an unjust and unequal world will be revisited in the research itself, and in evaluating action research as democratic method.

Chapter outlines

This account aspires not towards closure, or a narrative which congeals into 'truth' but sets out to celebrate a culture of complexity (Losito and Mayer, 1993) by experimenting with the construction of a 'writerly' text (Barthes, 1982). It can be only a partial, even a contradictory story — one account among many possible accounts.

Organising an account of practical work into a modernist written form is admittedly limited in the way it squeezes action into manageable linear chunks, quite unlike the unfolding of actual events. Thus chapters overlap and intersect, and all arise out of practical concerns and problems in my day-to-day work with teachers.

Chapter One explores action research as my chosen method, attending to questions of epistemology and research methods, especially the interview process, reflexivity and self-understandings, and validity. Chapter Two sketches the historical terrain and sets the scene for the project action and, together with Chapter Three, maps conditions of possibility for teacher development. Both

overlap with the chapters which follow, and indeed emerged from the work with teachers explored here.

Chapter Four examines the relationships established by myself with teachers and how these are shaped by relations of power which produce subjectivities within discursive practices. Chapters Five and Six consider teacher development through curriculum development, in particular exploring how the curriculum structures what pupils and teachers may say or do.

Chapter Six revisits the limits and possibilities of professional development and action research, both as a contribution to developing a critical tradition of action research in South Africa and as a strategy for reconstructing in-service teacher education (INSET), grounded in teacher development through reflective curriculum development.

Notes

1 A note on terminology is needed. At the time of writing the final draft, the government of national unity had assumed power. Under the previous National Party Government, South Africans were classified according to 'racial' categories which signified inequalities, based on skin colour. The terms African, coloured, Indian and white are used in this study for practical purposes only, to signal these inequalities rather than to accept 'race' as a given truth. The term Bantu education dates from the Verwoerd era when Africans were labelled Bantu, a highly derogatory term. Bantu education has been deliberately retained in this book as a statement about the history and inferior quality of the system. Finally, where the term *black* is used, this refers to all the previously politically oppressed - coloured, Indian and African.

2 Best and Kellner (1991) point out, however, that there is no unified body of postmodern theory. They further usefully interpret poststructuralism as a subset of postmodern theory where the latter is 'a more inclusive

phenomenon', and postructuralism 'a critique of modern theory and the production of new models of thought, writing and subjectivity, some of which are later taken up by postmodern theory' (p. 25).

3 All the names of the teachers, the principals and the schools are fictitious in order to protect their privacy.

Chapter One

Action research as method

> The point is not a set of answers, but making possible a different practice ... (Kappeler quoted in Lather, 1991, p. 159)

Starting out

I first became interested in action research over ten years ago as a newly appointed lecturer in history education at UCT. From having been a secondary school teacher, I had been catapulted into academic life and the requirement as part of my job was that I undertake 'research'.

But my primary commitment was to good practice in my own teaching and in classrooms, and it seemed that significant gaps existed in academic research regarding our understanding of teaching and learning. My concern with practice appeared at the time to be in tension with the dominant academic mode of production, including educational research, where knowledge produced is happily shelved and does not inform our practice. Standards or the rules of 'rigorous' educational research seemed also to encompass a narrow conceptualisation of what kinds of research, ways of knowing, and writing might contribute to our knowledge about teaching. Besides, positivist educational research ignored the ethical and political dilemmas generated when teachers (or pupils)

are treated as mere objects for the collection of data by academic researchers.

Defining action research

The term 'action research'[1] was first used by Lewin (1946, 1952), a North American social psychologist, concerned to develop a form of research which not only investigated social problems but which also influenced social action. In pre- and in-service teacher education this form of research is now seen as an appropriate strategy whereby teachers and teacher-educators might better understand and even improve their practice by adopting a reflective attitude, evaluating in particular the extent to which their educational values are implemented in their work (see for example Carr and Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1988 and Elliott, 1989). Thus action research also assumes that the quality of schooling and curricular experiences are crucially shaped by the actions of teachers, who are critical to changing what goes on in classrooms and schools. More broadly of course, action research is relevant for any practitioner (including teacher-educators) concerned with the quality of his/her professional work.

Definitions of action research have emerged over time out of attempts to develop this form of research as a valid education tradition, although such definitions should be regarded as heuristic rather than as attempts to capture some essential form of the research. The definitions which follow tend to emphasise the democratic and empowering thrust which advocates claim for action research. Some definitions lay greater emphasis on classroom work, others make stronger links between classroom work and wider

social processes. The strongest form of the latter is the definition by Carr and Kemmis:

> Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understandings of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out (1986, p. 162).

They highlight two essential aims of all action research — *improvement* of practice, including the situation in which the practice takes place, and *involvement* of all the participants, who take responsibility for their own actions, in the research process.

A more recent definition of action research from Kemmis and McTaggart emphasises the importance of collaboration:

> Action research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations ... The approach is only action research when it is *collaborative*, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the *critically examined action* of individual group members (authors' emphasis, 1988a, p. 5).

Elliott, influential in shaping British action research, defines it as:

> ... the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it ... [The] total process - review, diagnosis, planning, implementation, monitoring effects - provides the necessary link between self-evaluation and professional development (1982, p. 1).

And McNiff says action research:

> ... encourages a teacher to be reflective of his [sic] own practice in order to enhance the quality of education for himself and his pupils ... as such, it actively involves teachers as participants in their own educational process (1988, p. 1).

Similarly Whitehead (1985) sees action research as a means to 'give a form to the researcher's life in education', generating a 'living educational theory' arising from the practitioner's 'claim to know his or her own educational development'.

Common to all these definitions is a creative role for educators as agents in their own educational process as they construct knowledge of the curriculum. Nor is action research the same as good practice. Rather it turns on a notion of *deliberate* learning in which educators systematically collect and analyse evidence in order to reconstruct, rather than only recollect action for reflection and analysis.

Thus when I first encountered action research it seemed to offer a form of research integrating theory and practice dialectically, addressing educational action in ways which offered me the possibility of becoming a more skilled and flexible educator. Added to which, action research challenged the idea of objective, value-free research and the neutral role of the (outsider) researcher. Rather, the insider-researcher's assumptions and values shape the enquiry and become part of the argument - there can be no disinterested research.

The 'empowering' thrust of the 'emancipatory' form (see Carr and Kemmis, 1986) held strong appeal for me at that time, situated as I was in a profoundly unequal society, reflected in a schooling system marked by gross disparities. Here, it seemed, was a way to exercise

democratic political commitment for educational change through the research process itself, to aspire however imperfectly to critical and empowering research which challenges the status quo and generates 'emancipatory' knowledge in the interest of building a more just social order (Lather, 1991).

Nonetheless, when I started out I had no clear idea of quite how the process of action and reflection might unfold in concrete situations. It is thus important to emphasise that this text traces my developing understanding, not only through my work in PREP, but through subsequent reflection and engagement with action research in a university setting. It is further shaped by my engagement with aspects of poststructuralist theory which only happened after the empirical research and the writing of my doctoral thesis.

The rest of this chapter, then, shows my wrestling with the concepts of 'empowering' and 'emancipatory' action research, exploring epistemological and methodological questions arising out of my experience of conducting action research. It emerges from a process of shifting back and forth between the literature and working in the field.

Research Issues

Action research traditions influencing my own research

At the time when PREP was conceptualised in 1986, there were no precedents for action research projects in township schools, although there was evidence of promising work in Lesotho using the ideas of John Elliott (see Stuart *et al.*, 1985). Inevitably, the project design was influenced by traditions in action research from the North, in particular Carr and Kemmis (1986), Grundy (1987),

and the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) tradition in England.

Following Habermas (1972), Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Grundy (1987) have explicated three modes of action research — the technical, practical and emancipatory. Briefly, the technical form emphasises rule following, control, and a curriculum designed by outside experts, including prepackaged materials. This form promotes efficient and effective practice but in the interest of prediction and control rather than the development of teacher understandings. Teachers and pupils are instruments of change and the nature of this change supports technical rationality (see Schon, 1987 and Olsen, 1989). The practical form emphasises the self-understandings of practitioners, fostering teacher judgement and understanding in making decisions about classroom change for the 'good' of the pupils. Proposals for action claim to be intelligent rather than correct. Nonetheless, Carr and Kemmis and Grundy claim that the practical form lacks a critical focus on the structural context which shapes institutional practices.

By contrast, the emancipatory form 'promotes a critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical action to promote change' (Grundy, 1987, p. 162). Moreover, emancipatory action research is *collaborative*, involving all participants in the research process. Suffice to note, then, the attractiveness to progressive educators in South Africa of the emancipatory form underpinned by a commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality and justice. At the same time, I was also to discover that in practice these three modes of action research were rather more problematic to separate, and turn as much on a range of context-bound

meanings of 'emancipation' so that what seem 'practical' in one context may well be 'emancipatory' in a different setting.

The second key influence on the project design was the tradition of action research developed in England by Stenhouse (1975) and Elliott (1982), and reflected in CARE projects such as that of Hull, Rudduck and Sigsworth (1985). Stenhouse's view turns on the idea that 'curriculum research and development ought to belong to the teacher' (1975, p. 142). For Stenhouse it then followed that 'it is difficult to see how teaching can be improved or how curriculum proposals can be evaluated without self-monitoring on the part of teachers' (p. 165). Developing this philosophy over time in action research projects, Elliott (1988a) has recorded shifts in educational action research projects to the point where the generation of educational knowledge and research now rests firmly with teachers.

But in my own rather different situation I had underestimated the difficulties of doing emancipatory action research myself, of facilitating teachers' emancipatory action research, and even of facilitating action research at all. Moreover, I naively expected to transfer a Northern methodology unproblematically to a Southern setting. The critical point later underscored by Elliott (1988a) had not been taken into account: far from being imposed on teachers by academic researchers, action research developed organically from an existing teacher culture receptive to notions of innovation, of reflective practice, and curriculum theorising. Indeed, Elliott stresses, it *presupposed* such a culture. The point is that action research was rooted both in teachers' view of themselves as autonomous professionals, and a well-established movement for curriculum as process. These factors underpinned the shifts from educational

research on teaching to action research by teachers, over a period of time.

Yet such a receptive culture simply did not exist in Bantu education primary schools where the dominant view of educational activity on the part of teachers, even more than pupils, was to replicate what was given.

Nonetheless, influenced by these Australian and British traditions, the project design envisaged that action research would constitute a major vehicle for teacher 'empowerment' and educational 'transformation' through developing a critical classroom pedagogy. My own writing at that time reveals a confident assumption that the action research process had 'the potential to re-insert teacher agency into the struggle within education for the transformative schools, which aims to transform self and social relations ... rather than simply reproducing them' (Walker, 1988, p. 150). 'Democratic practice', 'enlightenment', and 'emancipation' were all central in this view of action research. I believed too, that action research would be overtly 'political', given prevailing material and political conditions in the townships. In other words, I assumed that practitioner engagement in action research would logically (and inevitably) develop into critical reflection on schooling and society.

Humanist traces

I thus started out by foregrounding teachers as capable of grasping the reality of their subordination in capitalist and racist social relations once engaged by myself as critical pedagogue. In this I demonstrated 'excessive faith in the powers of the reasoning mind'

(Lather, 1991, p. 84) and a belief in teacher (and my own) subject identities as unified and capable of full consciousness. Indeed, much action research seems underpinned by humanism and human relations theory, for example the work developed by Rapoport (1970) at the Tavistock Institute. Such work embodies a belief in the idea of a core individual as a product of the Enlightenment project of progress via education and human agency. The starting point of humanist assumptions is that someone has to choose and direct change themselves as an autonomous individual. The effect, however, may well be regulative rather than emancipatory where power relations are then masked under a veil of democratic style and individual freedom.

Emancipation, participation and empowerment

In all this, 'emancipation', 'participation' and 'empowerment' are recurring themes, and I have found Nederveen Pieterse (1992) helpful in further problematising such aspirations in action research. Reflecting on the multiple meanings of emancipation, he suggests that the use of the term has increased in recent years, given the apparent limitations of class analysis in the face of collective struggles which cannot be reduced to class alone. (Here feminism is the most obvious example.) Nederveen Pieterse thus conceptualises emancipation as 'a concept broader than class struggle', mapping the term back to the Enlightenment and the associated view of progress as a process of increasing equality.

Nonetheless, he notes, emancipation does not have any fixed meaning, unchanging over time. Although now used in the general sense of becoming free, or of the disadvantaged entering the mainstream, it is not inherently critical as a concept if power itself is

not changed or problematised. Thus an excluded group might become dominant ('emancipated') without the rules of society's game changing.

Similarly, the concept of participation which often goes along with emancipation may refer to integration (something which is not necessarily changing) rather than transformation. Citing Kaufmann (1991) he claims that the weakness of participation lies in what it leaves out: 'The issue is not simply whether or not certain groups participate but whether the mass of the population has the means to define the terms and nature of their participation' (quoted in Nederveen Pieterse, 1992, p. 5).

Turning next to empowerment, he describes as 'soft' those definitions where the direction of change and the distribution of power are not indicated. Empowerment has to be empowerment for something, and empowerment in somebody's interest. Nederveen Pieterse is worth quoting at length, given the centrality of relations of power and notions of empowerment in my own work:

> Part of the appeal of empowerment is the aura of power. But it does not necessarily problematize power. It does not differentiate between 'power to' (ability) and 'power over' (control), between empowerment as acquiring skills or as seeking control. It can denote anything from individual assertion to upward mobility through adaptation and conformism to established rules ... Accordingly empowerment may carry conservative implications, or more precisely, it is politically neutral. It does not necessarily imply a critical consciousness ... emancipation implies empowerment, but not every form of empowerment is emancipatory (p. 6).

Nederveen Pieterse suggests that emancipation (including notions of empowerment and resistance or protest) is a matter of 'critique and construction'. Unlike resistance, which he argues involves only refusal, reaction, and saying no, emancipation is transformation, introducing new values and aims, and new forms of cooperation and action.

Influenced, then, by postmodernism and poststructuralism the terrain shifts from the idea of emancipation as having one overriding meaning - freedom from class domination - to having many meanings, 'emancipations' rather than 'Emancipation':

> If the grand theme of modernity is human beings taking responsibility for their own destiny, that is the conscious programming and production of society, poststructuralism and postmodernism may be considered as reflections upon that project. They are reflections on what really happened and what went wrong, and as such they are essentially pleas for self-reflexiveness, particularly as regards the role of reason, knowledge and power, the exclusions of modernity, the dark side of the Enlightenment (p. 16).

Emancipation as a key project of modernity must also then be deconstructed and redefined. The emancipatory project (reconstruction) then becomes one of emancipation from the Enlightenment tradition and received notions (deconstruction). What the notion of diversity, and multiple 'emancipations' offers is an acknowledgement of the unevenness in social networks: 'Judgements as to which movements are most numerous or powerful in a society may homogenize and simplify the social terrain and ignore its uneven and composite network character' (p. 22). The discourse

of 'people's education' (see Chapter Two) is arguably one such example of an artificial unity obscuring differences of class, race and gender amongst the protaganists.

It also then follows that there is no 'truth' about emancipatory action research standing outside or prior to its social and historical context, and hence always open to challenge and argument by the reader. Otherwise we all run the risk of a 'politically correct' view which reduces a complex term like emancipation to a unitary meaning which demands conformity and consensus rather than dissent, contradiction and ambiguity.

Self-reflexivity and critical reflection

Nederveen Pieterse makes a plea for self-reflexivity, an activity central to the action research project, and made all the more important if, following Foucault (1980), one agrees that it is no longer a matter of positivist research versus post-positivist research, of surveys versus action research, because both are modes of power-knowledge. Reflexivity means that researchers need to recognise and understand the processes and values by which they are making sense of the world through self-critical practice (Fox and Stronach, 1986; Popkewitz, 1987; Winter, 1989). As Winter (1989) argues in putting forward the principle of dialectic reflexivity, action researchers cannot transform other social actors without transforming themselves, deconstructing in order to reconstruct their own practices.

Fox and Stronach indeed argue that if research is to lay claim to being educational 'then it must demonstrate its own reflexivity and intentionality' (1986, p. 143) instead of hiding behind objectivity

'under the pretence that processes of educating are distinct from processes of research' (p. 144). The educational in action research necessarily involves, they argue, introducing research *and* the 'invisible' researcher into critical focus so that there is a 'congruence between the reflective analysis of the research and of the researcher' (p. 150).

Self-Other

How, then, to move from a view to a review, from self-reproduction to critical self transcendence and 'a challenge directed to what is' (Foucault, quoted in Smart, 1983, p. 136). Are self understandings alone the source of critical reflection? Elliott (1991), for example, has criticised the 'importation' of social science theory to generate critique, something I argued *for* in my introduction. To elaborate further here, Kelly (1985) notes of her own involvement in the Girls into Science and Technology (GIST) project that it is all very well to talk of making one's taken for granted reality strange, but without an 'Other' view (however understood) this might not happen precisely because the familiar *is* taken for granted. She uses the example of sexism in classrooms which might not seem strange to teachers who have not questioned the patriarchal basis of society. As Kelly relates, this is all too evident in the writing of teacher researchers who continue to use 'he' to describe all their pupils.

Like Carr and Kemmis (1986) I would also argue that the self understandings of practitioners (myself included) cannot alone constitute a source of critical self reflection to problematise our most firmly held assumptions. Similarly, Winter seems to accord a place to social science theory to shape critical reflection. His explanation runs as follows: research (theory) disrupts the taken for granted of

action - 'action will find in research both an ally and an interrogator' (1987, p. 38). In action research the researcher is both participant in the action and inquirer into that same action. The knowledge which guides action can always be provisionally deemed to be sufficient for that course of action at that time, but it can also be deemed insufficient, in the light of the notion of 'greater understanding', which not action-but-research could possibly create. Action is enmeshed (however loosely) into a social system, whereas research is the process whereby the self-perpetuating processes of that system might be interrupted. This does not mean that theory (or 'research') prescribes action, rather that there is a continuous and unending relationship between theorist and social action - between self and self as Other.

Nonetheless, what is the nature of this disruption that can transform action and research? Winter suggests that 'it requires the possibility of a potential theoretic competence among social actors' (p. 5). To make this move we need to conceptualise critical reflection as neither wholly determined by the social domain nor grounded in the humanist assumption of human freedom and the individual's spontaneous capacity for self-transcendance. For Winter it then follows that action research must 'face the challenge posed by institutionalized authority systems to the possibility of individual critical reflection' (1987, p. 48). How, then, are history and politics embodied and embedded at the level of intersubjective relationships? In what ways is our awareness socially, institutionally and biographically constructed?

Moreover, does this approach — mapping the traces of the social domain in our own practices — mean apprenticeship of the practitioner to the theorist in recognition of the intellectual

authority of theory? Or is the question: how may action research be informed but not determined by theory as an innovative theorising subject able to transcend context (Winter, 1987)? One possible response is to say that the social order is available to action-research projects through the introjective gaze, explicated by Dowling (1993), and referred to in the introduction, of sociological theory.

But a reflexive action research would offer not 'theory' alone, but a dialectic of theory and action. Theory building would be different from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1968; see also Altricher and Posch, 1989) on the one hand and imposed theoretical formulations on the other, turning on a dialectical interplay in which theory illuminates practice and is illuminated by action in turn.

Elliott's concept of practical wisdom exemplifies what might constitute 'theory' in the context of action research:

> Wisdom can be defined as a holistic appreciation of a complex practical activity which enables a person to understand or articulate the problems s(he) confronts in realising the aims or values of the activity and to propose appropriate solutions. Conceived as an educational theory, wisdom constitutes a complex structure of ideas which cannot be broken down into its constitutive elements — as propositions — without the loss of meaning (1989, p. 83-84).

The claims by this study to have generated 'practical wisdom' can only be assessed in terms of the process described in the chapters which follow.

Insider-outsider

Elliott (1988b) argues that action research is distinguished by being conducted by 'insiders' to the practice under scrutiny. Action research is insider research. Yet in undertaking second order research into my own practice as a facilitator, this formulation becomes rather more complicated.

In the role of participant observer, I was an outsider trying to understand an unfamiliar educational setting — DET primary schools. Visiting schools on a regular basis over three years, I spent time, for example waiting in the staff room or corridor to see teachers, engaged in casual conversation with the principals, project teachers and occasionally other staff members, and a great deal of time in classrooms observing lessons. By simply being around at the schools I was able over time to develop a sense of the rhythm of the school day and a feel for the wider township environment.

Yet, even though I was an 'insider' to the process of curriculum change and the investigation of my own role in this, I was also the 'Other' — an outsider-academic, white and non-Xhosa speaking. There was little chance of my blending into the school surroundings as PREP researcher Lufuno Nevathalu was able to do. All this made it far more difficult to find 'vantage points and roles within a web of human relationships without destroying the fabric' (MacDonald and Walker, 1975, p. 60). To complicate the shifts between outsider and insider roles yet further, the university (UCT) at which the project was based was seen, fairly or not, as not having shown much concern for the education of Africans in the past.

To add to this, one is always in a sense 'on trial' in the field (Delamont, 1992), and required to 'prove' oneself, in my case

teachers wanted me to teach, as much to watch what I did as to establish my bona fides in making suggestions for different forms of practice. There was also the stress of not upsetting teacher sensibilities, and the unending hard work of establishing and maintaining rapport with teacher-informants.

Research processes

The action research cycle

Action research turns on the concept of a cycle spiralling into further cycles of action as developed by Lewin (1946). He describes the research process as 'a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action' (quoted in Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988b, p. 42). This spiral of cyclical activities is a method to create a change and then study the change and its effect. Elliott (1982), Ebbutt (1985) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988a), have developed and refined Lewin's original idea of a cycle of activities of action, analysis and implementation for educational research. McNiff (1988), Stuart (1988) and Griffiths (1990) all suggest that the spiral of action research cycles should be reconceptualised to take into account the reality of research practice where one problem will 'spin off' into linked spirals (McNiff, 1988). Stuart (1988) describes this as 'a number of mini-cycles rolling alongside bigger cycles'. In reality, action research is messy and complex and research cycles are not always sequential. Importantly, recurring reflection leads one to modify the action throughout the study in a recursive, rather than a linear research process.

All these diagrammatic schemes lack inherent explanatory power, however. There are two further related problems. 'Fact-finding' is, as noted earlier not a matter of technique only, but a theoretically shaped process. Related to this there is no problematisation of the critique leading to self-renewal in Lewin's spiral, a point I expand on later when I consider reflexivity. Winter points out that Lewin's spiral remains untheorised and undialectical in that 'the possibility for an increase in understanding is silently inscribed in the space between observation and reflection, between the investigator and the investigated' (1987, p. 43). How insight occurs then remains an unanswered question in the absence of the dialectic of theory and practice, of action and reflection, and subject and context, all of which I attempt to address.

Still, the concept of the cycle and the spiral are not without some practical relevance, provided one takes the above points into account. In my own study, my second order research into my practice of facilitation would be the major spiral. But nestling within this broad focus were numerous spirals of action, spinning out from the interaction of my second order research with the teachers' first order reflection. In the pilot study there were two sequential action cycles consisting of work over one term with English teachers, followed by work over another term with Std 3 History teachers. From 1988, as the project expanded, the research design became more complicated, and the linear form of a written report does not always adequately represent this complexity. Through 1988 and 1989 there were spirals of action spinning off from each other, and nestling simultaneously one with the other, as teachers and I worked through several action cycles on the processes of changing the teaching of reading and history. Working with these teachers

also led me to research the history and politics of Bantu education to better understand why things were the way they were. In order to improve my own practice, I needed to understand something of what had shaped teachers' professional knowledge.

Data collection

I worked in four schools with some 34 teachers. Neither the schools nor the teachers were chosen as a representative statistical sample of schools in the area. Rather mine was a case of 'opportunity' sampling (Delamont, 1992) which depended on which schools agreed to allow me access, and then which teachers in those schools wished to work with me.

Data were collected over three years (1987-1989) through participant observation, audiotaped planning and discussion sessions with teachers, interviews, lesson notes, audio and videotaped lessons, official syllabi and textbooks, curriculum materials, and field notes. Field notes recorded all visits to schools, ranging from meetings with teachers, to the making of arrangements and dropping off of transcripts or resources. For the most part field notes were written as soon as possible after the interactions. These notes were descriptive, but at times also recorded issues and worries in my own practice.

The process of working with teachers was recorded in audiotaped meetings where we planned and reflected on their lessons. Permission was first obtained from teachers for such a recording and was granted on the understanding that copies of transcripts were to be made available only to the teachers concerned, and to myself. In 1987 and 1988 a rough verbatim transcript of each

meeting was first made by Tozi Mgobozi, after which I made a corrected copy using the tape and her draft. The transcripts were not corrected with regard to language use to allow the authentic teachers' voices (and my own) to be heard, nor did I plan to produce perfectly 'accurate' transcripts for it is a dictate of empiricism that data provide the foundation for 'proof'. Copies of transcripts were returned to teachers as soon as possible - usually within a week or two of the meeting. In 1989, to reduce the burden of transcribing, I first listened to the tape, made a list of the contents and then selected extracts for transcribing.

Lufuno Nevathalu conducted interviews with all project teachers for me in September 1988. In September 1989, Tozi Mgobozi conducted further interviews with all project teachers to elicit biographical data for the study. I had hoped that this would encourage a process of reflection on teachers' own education but this initiative came too late in the life of the project for this data to be followed up. The sketchiness of this biographical data constitutes a silence in my study. On the other hand, this also raises important questions as to why teachers should have revealed the details of their lives to me. Thus while biographical data is potentially rich, even more than classroom data, it places teachers under the researcher's surveillance requiring teachers to participate in their own subjectification.

The names of teachers and their schools have been changed, but teachers would be recognisable to each other within their own schools. Indeed teachers were not particularly concerned about the destination of the audiotapes and videotapes but this could possibly be attributed more to unfamiliarity with research processes than to a lack of concern. Nor should it be interpreted as allowing unfettered

access to material on teachers' lessons or interactions with myself. The agreed principle of confidentiality in the project was that material was made available only with each participant's consent. This included my negotiating with teachers for access to taped interviews with the project evaluator. However, once access had been negotiated, final control over publication rested with the researcher. Yet this also then places additional responsibility on the researcher to report as ethically as possible.

Interviews

Audiotaped discussions and interviews were an important source of data for this study. For this reason I wish to explore the interview process at some length.

First, is the issue of the social relations of the interview process, given that these relationships are always asymmetrical in an unequal world and appropriation rather than empowerment is always a possibility (Patai, 1991). 'Unstructured' interviews do not eliminate the researcher's control over the process, while Patai (1991) bluntly states that any pretence at solidarity with those interviewed is a 'fraud'. Moreover, it is the researcher who translates interviews (spoken words) into written ones. As Sollers (1983) crisply states; 'Whoever does not write is written' (quoted in Lather, 1991, p. 96).

Second, is the point signalled by Patai and elucidated by Lather (1991), amongst others, that interview texts are a construction not a transparent account of 'reality'. There is no correspondence between 'account' and 'reality', nor are interview statements either accurate or distorted ('concealment') reports of reality (Silverman, 1985).

Thus interviews are not the raw material of any study but themselves interpretations where different interview conditions, with a different emphasis, could have produced a different account.

Moreover, interviews are conducted and constructed through language which organises and *produces* meaning in terms of the categories and questions posed. Underlining my earlier point, the interview also creates areas of silence: 'It is not the case that people as unitary sovereign subjects have knowledge which is accessed in "free" and "unconstrained" discussion' (Zavarzadeh and Moron, 1986, quoted in Lather, 1991, p. 113). In short, interviews do not reveal the 'facts', and data collection is a process of creation, not a matter of fact finding, shaped moreover by the press of collecting useful data for intended publication.

The shaping influence of the interview context is taken up by Hull (1985) in his elaboration of the researcher's 'blackmarket stock of understandings' which one is able to bring to bear on interpreting data and writing the research, but which is not in itself available in the actual data. This 'accumulated knowledge of participants meaning systems' is thus not in the transcripts, which Hull likens vividly to 'the interactive situation pressed, neatly flat, like washing from a mangle' (1985, p. 28). This leads him to ask how a researcher might make the basis of his or her interpretations available to the reader. How in effect, to give readers 'access to participants' perceptions as they had voiced them at interview'. In order to help the reader, I have tried to 'get at the meanings between the lines' by contextualising lengthy transcript extracts wherever possible at significant points in the research. These extracts try to represent as many different 'voices' as possible, remembering however, that in an

academic study such as this, the researcher ultimately, selects and interprets the data.

Methods of analysis

Methods for the analysis of data as part of the process of reflection have been rather neglected in accounts of action research. In this respect, a seminal article for my own research was Winter's (1982) development of 'dilemma analysis' as a means to create an account which evoked the main areas of tension in the research and illuminated the views of all involved. Dilemma analysis is guided by the concept of 'contradiction' and is so called 'to emphasize the systematic complexity of the situations within which those concerned have to adopt (provisionally at least) a strategy' (1982, p. 168). Winter outlines three levels of dilemma. The first level is 'ambiguities' comprising 'background awareness of the complexity of the situation but which are tolerable because they are not directly linked to action' (p. 169). At the second level, 'judgements' arise where complexity is not seen in negative terms but as 'interesting' and may be resolved. 'Problems' comprise the third level - 'those courses of action where the tensions and ambiguities actually seem to undermine the validity, the rationality of the action required' (p. 169). Chapters Four to Six explore key 'problem-dilemmas' grounded in the action itself, again without claiming to be exhaustive. These dilemmas are also grounded contextually and historically (temporally) - they remain at best inconclusive. Nor would I now regard dilemmas as comprising binary oppositions, but rather as inhering one within the other. Thus reform, say of curriculum practices, might include elements of transformation, depending on the context and conditions of possibility.

Also of use were Dearden and Laurillard (1976) who developed the idea of 'progressive focussing' as an analytical tool. This involves reducing the breadth of one's enquiry to concentrate on key issues. In this study dilemma analysis focussed the mass of data collected over three years and proved a useful tool to structure complex events. Analysis also turns on new organising categories generated by subsequent engagement with poststructuralist themes which resonated with a review of my thesis and the empirical data.

At the same time I found the process of analysis complex and uncertain, rereading and reviewing my mass of data repeatedly, and reorganizing the construction of my account several times (including this the latest construction). Although my account is rather less adventurous and arguably rather more unified than Winter's (1989) concept of a 'collage' or a 'plural account', nonetheless it still tries to 'give readers the resources with which to disagree' (or agree), and to incorporate different voices as independent interpretations (Winter, 1989). My narrative makes no claim to be a transparent or temporary report on an independent reality, nor the only possible interpretation of events but one account among many possible stories.

Issues of validity and generalisation

The issue of validity is a thorny one in action research studies. As McNiff puts it 'does the research really do the things it claims to do, and are the results to be believed' (1988, p. 131).

* *Triangulation*

One of the usual ways in which action research data can be validated is by the technique of triangulation — multiple data

sources, for example the teacher's view of the lesson, pupils' views, and a participant-observer perspective (see for example, Elliott, 1977; Somekh, 1983; Mathison, 1988). The aim is to arrive at 'a truthful proposition' (Mathison, 1988, p. 13). As Mathison notes, the strategy does not in itself make sense of events but rather provides more and better evidence for the researcher to construct an explanation. Nor should triangulation be seen as only a search for congruence. At times triangulation may reveal congruence but also ambiguity and even contradictions (Mathison, 1988).

Silverman (1985), however, argues that this view of triangulation as the comparison of accounts to eliminate bias or subjectivity has strong positivist overtones in that it assumes a single reality and treats accounts unproblematically as multiple mappings of this reality — more data reinforces a 'truth' claim. This does not mean not generating data in multiple ways. Rather, says Silverman, the mistake would be to use data to 'adjudicate between accounts' without taking into account the context in which data have been generated: 'What goes on in one setting is not a simple corrective to what happens elsewhere — each must be understood in its own terms' (1985, p. 21). The point here is that data gathered in different settings cannot simply be added for a more complete picture, and research accounts always remain partial and incomplete.

McNiff (1988) discusses validation at some length in terms not dissimilar from the notion of triangulation. She suggests that there are three steps to establishing the validity of a claim to knowledge — self-validation, peer validation and learner validation. The problem here is the undue faith placed on human relations through interaction, setting aside the problematic of how the (macro) social speaks in the views we hold. Moreover, it would be a mistake to

imagine that by layering all these views (self, peers, learners) one on the other that we arrive at a complete or true account of events. What we have is still an interpretation where the perspectives of multiple informants (teachers, school principals, colleagues) have been shaped in turn by historical and social contexts.

This is not to argue, however, that McNiff's formulation has no practical relevance. Overall, such validation procedures aspire to 'critical intersubjectivity', that is, a subjectivity 'sufficiently controlled to allow critical scrutiny' (Stenhouse 1978, p. 33). Besides, if learning is social, as I believe, then we learn from this engagement with peers and from hearing other points of view which then constitute a 'collaborative resource' (Winter, 1989) for our own research.

Critical subjectivity

Now, in action research the researcher is both practitioner *and* researcher. But traditionally research advocates 'objectivity' in the production of valid and generalisable knowledge — 'measurement without the measurer' as Raymond Williams says (quoted in Yeo, 1990, p. 127). Action research, however, inescapably involves promoting certain values rather than others, while data collection relies heavily on people. McNiff (1988) suggests that action research is unavoidably subjective but that one strives for objective status through intersubjective criticism, or a critical subjectivity. Yeo argues in similar vein that in the context of long-standing debates between historians, that subjectivity is the precondition for any real objectivity: 'The self as complicated, divided, conflicted, large enough and self-conscious enough to let others in to listen, is now a prime tool — a skill as well as an "understanding" for historians'

(1990, p. 127). Elliott maintains that the whole point of action research is reflection on the self-in-action and not 'to objectify the situation in a form which disassociates the self from its actions' (1989, p. 98). By acknowledging the value-laden nature of action research, the researcher in fact enables the reader to take this into account in assessing the findings. It means acknowledging that our research is neither value free nor theory independent — the 'facts' we find are themselves produced by the theoretically informed questions we ask, in turn shaped in my case by my commitment to emancipatory knowledge.

Admittedly, as Lather (1991) remarks, a commitment to emancipatory knowledge and an acknowledgement of one's own assumptions, faces the danger of a 'rampant subjectivity'. But the task then is make our interpretations empirically accountable, while also searching for workable ways of establishing the trustworthiness of our data. Our empirical evidence should anchor our theoretical formulations, as suggested earlier in the notion of critical intersubjectivity.

The point is to emphasise yet again the reflexivity of the researcher, so that validity and reliability are not so much about 'truth' or 'falsity' as about shifting the emphasis to the contexts in which meanings are produced and the multiple and contradictory possible readings not only of these contexts but of the research report itself. Delamont sums it up:

> Each researcher is her own best data collection instrument, as long as she is constantly self-conscious about her role, her interactions, and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. As long as qualitative researchers are reflexive,

> making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served (1992, p. 9).

This means a shift to a discursively reflexive position 'in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault, quoted in Lather, 1991, p. 38).

Nor should we forget that action research is both research *and* action, and its key purpose is to improve educational practice. This leads Elliott (1989) to formulate validity in terms of the improvement of practice:

> In the final analysis the ultimate validation of specialised knowledge about education is that it enables educational practitioners to discover better solutions to the complex practical problems they confront in realising educational values in action (1989, p. 86).

It is in the light of these comments and my attempts at a reflexive critical awareness that the validity of this study should be evaluated by its readers.

- ***Generalisation***

Qualitative research does not eschew generalisation. As Atkinson and Delamont point out, this research tradition, within which action research studies fall, does not deal only with 'a series of self-contained, one-off studies which bear no systematic relationship to each other' (1985, p. 39). Indeed action research studies should contribute to cumulative knowledge about educational processes.

But generalisation is not achieved merely by surveys or the replicability of units:

> Despite their diversity, individual classrooms share many characteristics. Through the detailed study of one particular context it is still possible to clarify relationships, pinpoint critical processes and identify common phenomena (Delamont and Hamilton, 1984, p. 19).

Thus I have made the assumption in working with a small group of teachers and schools that, if I can understand the experience of this group and describe it in appropriate language, it will resonate with the experience of others undertaking similar studies. This would be similar to Stake's (1980) 'naturalistic generalisation' and Lather's (1991) 'face validity' which provides 'a click of recognition' and a 'yes of course' on the part of the reader so that generalisation lies within the purview of the reader rather than the researcher.

Doing research in an unjust world

Finally, I want to explore briefly the issue of trying to do ethical research in an unjust world. As Patai (1991) points out, I should not gloss over the fact that it was the very existence of my own privilege as a white university-based research officer that allowed my research to be initiated, even though I might have subscribed to democratic values. Furthermore, in her view, 'empowering' or 'dialogic' research designs, while promising, do not resolve the fundamental contradiction between the enjoyment of research as research, and putting one's energies at the service of social change. The former, she argues, may well dilute commitment to the latter.

Patai further notes that research relationships and interaction are more usually asymmetrical — for example in my own research teachers must reveal their work processes ('confess') to me for inspection ('research'), but not vice versa. The common justification that 'they got something out of it too', even if accurate, still does not challenge the inequalities on which the entire process rests. Neither does an 'empowering' stance of mutual learning and genuine dialogue:

> For we continue to function in an overdetermined universe in which our respective roles ensure that *other* people are always the subject of our research, almost never the reverse (Patai, 1991, p. 149).

Patai is echoed by Ellsworth when she writes that 'all voices ... are not carrying and cannot carry equal legitimacy, safety and power' under present structural conditions (1989, p. 312). Nor does a plurality of voices resolve this — it is not a case of correction through adding more voices. Thus, suggests Patai, we need to move from a dialogical community to a 'sustained encounter with currently oppressive formations and power relations' (p. 308), including owning up to one's own place in these formations, and even to the possibility that it may not be possible to write about the oppressed without becoming the oppressor.

Patai's arguments resonate for me, but action research also makes the researcher doubly vulnerable — not only one's research process but one's action must be exposed for critical reflection. Hence it is only now that I feel able to admit to the oppressiveness, at times, of my own processes. Here Patai provides some small comfort, however, saying that:

> ... we must not lose sight of the fact that these are not, in fact, personal problems of overly sensitive individuals. They are, rather, genuine ethical dilemmas that the broader society, built on inequalities, strategically induces us to disregard (p. 145).

Importantly, she does not believe that the alternative is either 'abdication or intellectual paralysis' for 'too much ignorance exists in the world to allow us to await perfect research methods before proceeding' (p. 150). Rather the point is that 'in an unethical world, we cannot do truly ethical research' (p. 150) for this, in the end, requires political action. As Patai emphasises, we have to decide whether our research is worth doing, and in the doing of it to try and serve our stated goals.

The chapters which follow reflect at a critical (perhaps 'safer') distance on my practice of action research, given that the fieldwork had been completed by the end of 1989, and the thesis written by early 1991. My analysis will try to understand, but not necessarily definitively answer, a number of related questions: what conditions make action research possible; how is emancipatory action imbricated in power-knowledge relations; are critical forms of action research indeed possible in an unjust world; what constitutes an empowering approach to generating knowledge? And, Lather's (1991) question: what would a sociological project look like that was not a technology of regulation and surveillance?

Notes

1 For a comprehensive account of international developments in action research see Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988b) *The Action Research Reader*. This traces developments from Lewin in North America, to work in Britain, Australia, Europe and Latin America.

Chapter Two

Setting the scene

'What we have here is not education' (Soweto teacher, 1988)

This chapter sets the scene for the project action: the rationale behind the Primary Education Project; the importance of primary education and teacher development for quality primary schooling; and a sketch of the historical legacy of Bantu education and the political and education conditions that prevailed during the period I worked in township schools.

The importance of primary education

It hardly needs saying that the project was informed by a commitment to the importance of primary education in South Africa. Carnoy (1982) argues that investment in primary schooling can play a crucial role in the redistribution of income to low earners; Neville Alexander has pointed out that what happens in any modern, relatively industrialised country is to a large extent determined by what is taught (or is not taught) in the primary and pre-primary sectors (*Cape Times* 15/1/91); and the World Bank claims that effective primary education 'is a rock bottom necessity for development' (1991, p. 10). Furthermore, emerging research on developing countries shows that educational *quality* and not only quantity (number of years) 'strongly shapes academic achievement and eventual economic returns to educational investments' (Fuller,

1986, p. 491). In other words, returns on investment in schooling depend on the actual *learning* that occurs, rather than simply the number of years of schooling.

Nor should we forget that primary education is still terminal for the majority of pupils, and likely to remain so in the short- to medium-term future, making it more urgent that we provide quality primary education for all. Such an education would include critical literacy for citizenship in a democratic society, the capacity for lifelong learning, and the skills and values for economic development in the interests of all South Africans, both at the level of the local community, and nationally.

The Primary Education Project

The first phase of PREP was conceptualised in late 1986 against a turbulent backdrop of school boycotts and political repression. Yet, despite the often seemingly hopeless situation in schools (70% of the DET secondary and primary schools in greater Cape Town were out on boycott by the end of 1986) PREP was informed by optimistic strategies of engagement and possibility, articulated as follows in the preamble to the project:

> We think that we need to build now in our schools for what we want later. We do not believe that we can set aside the educational needs of a generation of students to some future time. Schools can, we think, be sites of change. So we need to think seriously about what kind of programme might be developed to help deepen the understandings of pupils and teachers in the schools now, of what is educationally

possible within current school frameworks, and so empower them to realise education in their practice.

The main aim of the project was 'to test the feasibility of action research as a means to support practising teachers who seek to improve the educational provision in which they work', supplemented by three further aims:

- to explore a pedagogy for a future non-racial and democratic South Africa, while recognising what was educationally possible within current school frameworks;
- to place the professional knowledge and insight of the teacher at centre stage so that teachers become confident enough to innovate in their classroom practice;
- to design a model for the professional development of teachers in-service.

In order to build tomorrow today, I myself, as the university-based researcher, and teachers in four DET schools (first a pilot school and then expanding to others), would explore what was educationally possible within current school frameworks, overlaid with a vision that looked beyond the immediate to a different future. Teachers' own practical problems, as they understood them, were to be the focus of the project, while I would also research my own practice as a facilitator[1].

The Faculty of Education at UCT was seen as a home for the project for a number of reasons. It offered a pre-service degree for teachers in primary education; it had developed a good working relationship with some local township schools through their involvement in micro-teaching at the Faculty and contact via UCT students

undertaking teaching practice in those schools; some teachers at these schools had expressed interest in 'learning new methods' and 'improving their teaching'; and, there was informal evidence that principals welcomed this link with UCT.

Sivuyile, a primary school in Guguletu, was chosen for the pilot phase, given both friendly working relations over the years, and, in a heightened political climate, the principal and staff's apparently low-key political profile which was less likely to attract the unwelcome attention of the obstructionist DET. Indeed, believing that the project would improve pupils' English, the regional DET office gave *unofficial* permission to pursue work in the school. From 1988, however, even this unofficial permission was withdrawn without any reason being given.

In April 1987, I began working part-time in one school as PREP's research officer. From April to July, I worked with five English teachers drawn from Std 3 to 5; from July to September I worked with five Std 3 teachers, concentrating on the teaching of History. Then in 1988 and 1989, I worked full-time in three further schools, supporting teachers in improving their teaching of reading in the junior and senior primary school, and the teaching of History in Stds 3 and 4. During 1988 and 1989 three project newsletters were distributed to all DET primary schools in the greater Cape Town area, and in September 1989 I prepared the draft manuscripts for a series of accessible booklets on the teachers and their work. Overall, I worked with a total of 34 teachers for varying periods of time between 1987-1989.

Teacher development and educational change

Central to my study (and to PREP) was the further argument that teachers and teacher development are crucial for changes in classroom practice and the reconstruction of quality primary education (see Hawes, 1979; Lewin, 1985; Van den Berg 1987). As project participant, Elizabeth Mgwebu, explained: 'I must change myself first so that the kids can change ... I can't say the education must change whereas I have not been changed myself.' How personal and curriculum change articulate with each other and with structural change are complex questions turning on issues of social structure and human agency, and these will be addressed in the chapters to follow.

The point to signal here is that teachers had been poorly served by Bantu education, not least by the problematic quality of pre-service college training underpinned by the enterprise of fundamental pedagogics. This, Kallaway has cuttingly characterised as dressing up 'the blatant politically chauvinist and racist nature of the earlier educational doctrines of Afrikaner Nationalist ideology in academically respectable garb' (1983, p. 162). Little official encouragement was then given to teachers to improve their work, and, not surprisingly, African primary school classrooms were mostly dominated by the same teacher-talk, recitation, and drill and practice which the teachers themselves had experienced as pupils.

Without doubt, such practices are still deeply entrenched. As we now realise, post-apartheid teachers have not simply 'broken out' in the wake of democratic political change. As Williamson reminds us, education 'is so heavily conditioned by constraints and compromises of the past that it has to be seen as reproducing three societies

simultaneously, the past, the present and the future' (1979, p. 208). Any strategy for transforming primary education will thus have to recognise the disabling reality for thousands of practising teachers of the legacy of apartheid education generally, and Bantu education in particular. As Mr Lingiswe, principal of Sizithabathele school, remarked:

> I've been through the mill of bantu education so I'm its product. So unless that product is going to give again the poison [of bantu education], the teacher has got to improve so that one gives the kids something completely different. So in a way you have got to start with the teacher (interview 29/5/88).

And a former township primary school teacher, now lecturing at a teachers' college, summed up the problem when she said:

> I don't think teachers are well trained to do what they are doing ... you can't expect good results from the children because the teachers aren't confident and well trained (interview 26/7/90).

The question is, then, what factors might predispose teachers to the possibility of change, or to resist or ignore new directions in their work?

* *My assumptions about INSET*

In my doctoral thesis I had argued as follows: Democratic and participatory forms of INSET, in which teachers are participants in change, rather than uncritical receivers, users and implementers of 'teacher-proof' curricula, should be developed. While this did not necessarily mean that teachers would determine for themselves how

best to organise curricula, it did imply that the motivation, understanding and everyday realities of teachers working under much less than ideal circumstances must be taken into account if changes were to be effectively implemented.

I further argued (and assumed) that education must itself be organised democratically in schools and classrooms if it was to prepare young people for more intelligent and constructive participation in democratic forms of life. Yet, I wrote, it also did not necessarily follow that achieving participatory democracy in the organisation of education would be an easy or even rapid process. Teachers, as much as their pupils, should be encouraged to work collectively and to enter into educative relationships with one another. In the end teachers who were not themselves critical and creative thinkers, committed to collective work and building a participatory democracy, would find it difficult to facilitate these processes in their own classrooms. The point for me was that democratic education was an ideal worth pursuing in PREP, given the educative potential of the *practice* of democracy, of what Raymond Williams describes as the importance of 'collective activity and self-organisation' in offering 'repeated evidence of practical possibility' (1980, p. 263).

Equally though, I suggested, teachers who did not experience democratic and participatory activities in their own pre- and in-service education would hardly be well prepared to work in this way with pupils. In Tanzania, for example, while teachers had been regarded as the 'apostles' of Education for Self-Reliance, their own personal and professional education was acquired in the context of values which rewarded individual initiative and competitive

behaviour. All this had militated against their adoption of more democratic classroom practices (Urch, 1989).

All this will be taken up in the chapters that follow, based on my own practices and experiences in PREP over three years.

Rehearsing the historical record – from Bantu education to people's education

First, however, I wish to briefly sketch the historical and material context, and education and political conditions between 1987-1989 as factors also shaping conditions of possibility for action research and democratic forms of INSET. Moreover, this serves as a passing reminder to us of the need to nurture rather than expunge historical memory as we seek to understand the framework for educational change both then and now.

The establishment of Bantu education

Underpinned by the ideology of 'Christian National Education' (CNE) which demanded 'no mixing of languages, no mixing of cultures, no mixing of religions, and no mixing of races' (quoted in Christie, 1985, p. 160), Hendrik Verwoerd, as the then Minister of Native Affairs, elaborated the purposes of Bantu education in a 1954 Senate speech:

> Native education should be controlled in such a way that it should be in accord with the policy of the state ... If the native in South Africa today ... is being taught to expect that he [sic] will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake ... There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of

> labour ... For this reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze (quoted in Rose and Tunmer, 1975, p. 266).

The Bantu Education Act empowered the government to centralise control of African schooling in its own hands. All schools now had to be registered; it became a criminal offence to operate a school not registered with the Department of Bantu Affairs; and syllabi were now centrally prescribed and oriented towards CNE. Trained in state-controlled colleges, the role of teachers was straightforward — they were to reproduce state ideology. As Verwoerd bluntly stated: 'People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for natives' (quoted in Harsch, 1980, p. 99).

In effect, Bantu education aimed at meeting the political and economic goals of both apartheid and capitalism (Unterhalter and Wolpe, 1989). On the one hand, Verwoerd hoped to allay white workers' fears of job competition from skilled Africans. On the other, Bantu education would reproduce and control a cheap, unskilled and semiliterate labour force, and at its higher levels, semiskilled workers, to meet the economic needs of capital in the mines, farms and factories.

Material inequalities

The outrageous material inequalities of Bantu education had changed little some 33 years later. While 83% of all African children attended school by 1987 (Resa 2, 1988, p. 2), there were

still vast discrepancies in spending by the different education authorities, further compounded by the historical backlog in educational provision for African pupils. Per capita spending in 1987/88 ranged from R2 299 spent on each white pupil to R366 spent on each African pupil (SAIRR, 1988, p. 151). Double sessions (the same teacher taking two classes per day) operated in 312 African primary schools, involving 68,700 pupils in 1987. The platoon system (two teachers for two classes in the same room) operated in 210 schools involving 169,188 pupils (SAIRR, 1989, p. 263). Pupil-teacher ratios for white schools were 16 to 1; for urban African schools they were 41 to 1[2].

Not surprisingly the dropout rate at African schools was, and is, high. In 1987, 1 134 116 African pupils enrolled in Sub A, the first year of primary schooling (SAIRR, 1989, p. 269). In the same year, 171 700 dropped out of Sub A (SAIRR, 1989, p. 269). This appalling attrition rate continued throughout the years of primary schooling, so that 63% of African pupils had dropped out by the end of the primary phase in 1987, and over a million African children between the ages of 7 and 16 were not in school at all that year (SAIRR, 1989, p. 259). Yet in 1989, 50% of the education budget was allocated to white education (*Argus* 17/3/89). On the ground, these statistics translated into a situation where teachers often lacked confidence in themselves as they struggled in overcrowded classrooms and hopelessly underresourced schools.

Resistance to apartheid education

Yet by the 1980s the always dubious legitimacy of Bantu education had also been irrevocably shattered, and people's education for people's power had emerged by 1986 as the new rallying cry, out of

widespread social and educational resistance. Formed in December 1985, the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC)[3] spearheaded a shift from the increasingly pointless recapitulation of the failures of Bantu education to a positive consideration of the form and character of a post-apartheid education system. In March 1986 the NECC defined the principles of people's education as follows:

1 It enables the oppressed to understand the evils of the apartheid system and prepares them for participation in a non-racial democratic system.

2 It eliminates the capitalist norms of competition, individualism, and stunted intellectual development and encourages collective input and active participation by all, as well as stimulating critical thinking and analysis.

3 It eliminates illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation of one person by another.

4 It equips and trains all sectors of our people to participate actively and creatively in the struggle to attain people's power in order to establish a non-racial democratic South Africa.

5 It enables workers to resist exploitation and oppression in their workplace. (quoted in RESA 3, 1988, p. 21).

Peoples' *power* was inextricably part of people's education. Eric Molobi, then of the NECC, put it this way:

> Since education as we have known it has been used as a tool of oppression, people's education will be an education that must help us to achieve people's power. People's education

> is therefore decidedly political and partisan with regard to oppression and exploitation (quoted in Levin, 1989, p. 3).

Thus the transformation of education and the transformation of society as a whole were now firmly linked as part of one common struggle. The critical point was that people's education could be struggled for in the present, even if it could only finally be implemented when the struggle for democracy had also been won.

Nonetheless, the discourse of people's education also glossed over the different, multiple and competing voices subsumed by the artificial unity in the concepts of 'the people' and 'the community' (see Levin, 1989) so that the political direction of people's education was always likely to be shaped by the particular configuration of political forces that emerged in the wake of 1986. In this respect, severe repression and the banning of organisations in 1988 effectively uncoupled people's education from people's power and mass political action. The optimism of late 1985 and 1986 gave way to a hiatus in attempts to put into practice the principles of people's power.

Repressive moves

The overall mood was far less militant and less hopeful by 1987 when I began work in schools, not least because on 27 December 1986 regulations in terms of the Public Safety Act of 1953 empowered the Director-General of Education and Training to prohibit all non-official syllabi, courses, pamphlets or books in order to create a 'healthy climate' in the schools (Muller, 1987). Finally, on 9 January 1987, further regulations in terms of the Public Safety Act prohibited all gatherings on or behalf of the NECC to discuss unauthorised syllabuses (Muller, 1987). Muller concluded:

> The harshness of this reaction made the state's attitude to people's education unambiguously clear. The NECC was left running its operation from hiding since its offices were regularly raided by the police. By the beginning of 1987 progress had slowed to a snail's pace (1987, p. 26).

This was closely followed by the restriction of 17 extra-parliamentary organisations in February 1988, including the United Democratic Front (UDF), and the NECC. At the end of that year, the restrictions were extended to two progressive teachers' union and the umbrella students' congress in the Western Cape because, claimed a Law and Order spokesman, 'they played an active role in the people's education struggle which was an ANC-inspired education system for South Africa' (*Argus* 30/12/88).

Education and wider political conditions in Cape Town

Not surprisingly, the local situation was always volatile and unstable at the time I worked in PREP. Security force restrictions, the continuing state of emergency, DET intransigence over the registration of high school pupils (a possible ploy to reduce student numbers), and the appointment of 'verkrampte' white principals marked the years 1987 to 1989. The police and army were very much in evidence, patrolling township streets and parked inside or near school gates, and on more than one occasion I was stopped and questioned at roadblocks set up to monitor movements in and out of the townships.

Nonetheless resistance bubbled beneath the surface, while this simmering resentment and student anger occasionally erupted into open defiance. It was evident too in the daily breakdown of formal

secondary schooling and the collapse of the tattered remnants of a learning culture as pupils arrived late, milled about aimlessly, or moved their desks onto sunny school verandas to chat and gossip, and then left school early, all despite the attempts of white principals to impose discipline. If violence flared against these principals, vanloads of police simply moved onto school premises to intimidate students into submission.

While primary schools continued to function, except during periods of community-wide protest, such as stayaways, nevertheless they too were affected by crisis and struggle. Three of the schools in which I worked were adjacent to secondary schools and it was difficult to ignore the empty schools, locked gates and the garish yellow police vehicles guarding school premises. Pupils in all these schools were the younger brothers and sisters of secondary school students and hence aware of the problems. Teachers were both the products of the system and, as part of the community, worked in a tense and unpredictable situation which at times erupted into violent confrontations with the security forces.

Moreover, on one occasion at least the benevolent mask of the DET was ripped away to reveal its covert surveillance of 'subversive' teachers when it launched a 'witchhunt'. This took the form of a circular to secondary school principals in September 1988 asking them to name 'radical' teachers and the extent of involvement in 'subversive activities' at their schools of progressive parent, pupil and other organisations. Having first denied any knowledge of the circular, the DET then claimed it was part of a programme of 'assessing progress' at the schools (*South* 15/9/88).

The situation was further complicated after mid-1988 by the new and disturbing phenomenon of gang violence as their turbulent and often vicious battles spilled onto school premises. In the second half of 1988 attendance at the primary schools where I was working with teachers dropped as pupils were often too scared to cross gang territory to get to school (*Cape Times* 9/7/88).

My final working term in the schools, the third term of 1989, was marked by widespread protest against the tricameral elections. My work with teachers had to be abandoned from mid-August 1989 as both primary and secondary schools became caught up in the national protest against the September elections for all three houses of parliament. In the first week of August the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) announced a national defiance campaign to include defiance of restriction orders on activists, the unbanning of organisations, protest action at educational institutions, and a mass refusal to observe laws segregating facilities such as hospitals and beaches. It proved to have overwhelming appeal across the length and breadth of rural and urban South Africa. As an MDM spokesperson explained, people were saying that 'we can no longer jail ourselves, nor accept segregation and racial division, nor stand silent in the face of crushing economic problems of the mass of our people' (*New Nation* 17/8/89).

To be sure, these protests did not go unchallenged by the state, and the Western Cape experienced a particularly severe police response. In Cape Town rallies and marches were met yet again with sjamboks and teargas, arrests and detentions. At times, areas like Guguletu and Mitchells Plain were enveloped in palls of black smoke from burning tyre barricades. Headlines such as 'Streets of Fire — it's war in our schools', and 'The tyre and teargas election'

captured vividly the form and extent of anger, resistance and repression.

The unstable political context was further exacerbated by the DET's dreadful inefficiency, with the result that arrangements to meet and work with project teachers were frequently broken. Sports meetings, for example, were literally arranged the previous day; teachers were sent off on courses with no prior notice; principals were called in to meet with the DET, and so it went on. It hardly needs saying that my research could not be smoothly planned and carried out.

Transformation or only reform?

Given the conditions obtaining between 1987 and 1989, was it possible at all to reconstitute people's education at the level of the school site? Unterhalter and Wolpe (1989) have argued that the gradual introduction of alternative materials in English, History and Mathematics proposed in 1986 had been a constructive challenge *at that time* to Bantu education. But they emphasise that these developments had to be set within the prevailing framework of developing structures of people's power as a project of possibility:

> Although the partial 'reforms' which could be implanted in bantu education would be of value in themselves the fundamental point is that they were intended to be the *outcome of a political process*, in particular the assertion of people's power in the sphere of education. It is precisely this which would have given the achievement of changes in bantu education their specificity as expressions of people's power and not merely as reforms (authors' emphasis, 1989, p. 15).

Because it was very difficult to develop and refine the principles of people's education after 1986, they argue that the concept was appropriated by reformist agencies such as private schools, and even by the state, all of whom had sought to adapt people's education *within* the existing system, rather than to radically transform education.

The same applies, they suggest, to the development of new teaching methods which had been envisaged initially as being part of a much wider struggle for people's power in education and society:

> This insertion of new syllabuses and texts in the private and bantu education schools may be a forward step to the extent that they are an improvement on existing syllabuses and texts, but once again, it is essential to recognise the political limitations of such developments, even where these materials conform to 'people's education'. First, the insertion does not take place through struggles involving collectives of teachers, parents and students. Second, in this situation, the improved means of teaching are simply accommodated within existing structures and do not present themselves as an element in the creation of a radical alternative. In this sense, there is a danger that they take on a narrow, reformist connotation (authors' emphasis, 1989, p. 18).

Thus, in this view, curriculum action in the period 1987-1989 could *only* have taken a reformist turn, separated as it had been from the development of people's power by highly repressive conditions. On the other hand, were there then no possibilities for curriculum change in primary schools in particular? What were the structural

limits shaping classroom-based curriculum development projects at that time? Were such efforts merely unimportant details in the larger political scheme for liberation? How, indeed was 'transformation' to be understood?

The township scene

All this action and these questions and dilemmas were worked out in the concrete setting of four schools in two adjacent African townships. The older part of the township in which two of the project schools, Sivuyile and Khanyisiwe, are situated dates back to the early 1960s. Africans had been moved from white and coloured areas to the then remote, wind-swept, sandy, and treeless township as part of the state's group areas drive, euphemistically known as 'slum clearance'. One teacher recalled the huge sand dunes that surrounded the school she had worked in: 'There were big, big dunes this side, and we usually said "that is Sokhanyo desert", there used to be a great pile of sand next to the classrooms, so we had to plant grass there to remove the desert'.

Most of the houses surrounding the schools are cramped, shabby, semi-detached brick homes in varying states of repair, painted in different colours. Khanyisiwe school is adjacent to a squatter settlement of tightly packed flimsy tin shanties with access neither to running water nor proper toilets, nor especially weatherproof in the face of Cape Town's raging winter storms. While the schools have electricity, the same could not be said at that time of the surrounding houses and shacks, and streets were pitch dark at night. In the dusty central business district, a small supermarket, small businesses such as a tailor and a panelbeater, a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet, a thriving minibus taxi terminus, three filling

stations, and an upmarket nightclub all operated. But in the face of the prolonged and deep economic recession, few job opportunities for school leavers, grinding poverty for many, and the ravages of apartheid laws, violent crime was rampant, while at the tuberculosis day clinic, the straggling, shabby queue of men, women and children seemed to grow ever longer[4].

The roads providing access to Sivuyile and Khanyisiwe are tarred, but pitted with deep potholes making them almost impassable in heavy winter rains. There are somewhat newer, but equally small, brick homes in the streets surrounding the other two schools, Phakamisa and Sizithabathele, and the access roads are newer, wider and in better condition.

In the streets outside the schools, wandering geese, the occasional dusty cat and thin scavenging dogs foraged; a home-based car repair business operated from the overgrown street verge; poorly dressed children, unemployed youths and men hung about on street corners and on pavements, and pavement traders and 'spaza' shops located in tin shacks plied their trade, selling small packets of groceries, cigarettes, fruit and vegetables, cooked meat, second-hand clothing, and so on. During school break times women arrived at the schools, wheeling supermarket trolleys, to sell various foodstuffs in small quantities — single sweets, handfuls of crisps, homebaked cakes, pieces of chicken, and so on. When their wares were spread on the ground, each school resembled a small African market.

The school settings

Sivuyile, where the project started in 1987, is a typical single story red brick township school built in 1968 using private funds raised

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by a national newspaper group. It comprised two long rows of classrooms connected at one end by three tiny rooms which served as a staff room, a storeroom/school clerk's office and the principal's office. Inadequate 'drop' toilets were located in a small building behind the school. Astonishingly, this cramped building housed 742 pupils from Std 3 to Std 5 and their 17 teachers. The area between the two rows of classrooms was covered with grass, interspersed with a few limp flowers. At one end of the school building there was a neglected overgrown open area used as a playground and 'sportsfield'. Like most township schools, after the disturbances of 1985 and 1986 the school had been enclosed by a high steel mesh fence, while the gates were kept securely locked to ensure access to the school was restricted to pupils and staff.

In 1988 I extended my work to three more schools. Two of these, Phakamisa and Sizithabathele, were then relatively new. They had been built in 1981 for some of the former residents of a squatter community who had successfully negotiated a deal with the state whereby they would be provided with permanent housing. The schools were situated adjacent to one another and to a double storey high school. No maintenance work had been done on either school since they had been built and the cream-coloured interior paintwork looked grubby and uninvitingly dull. The administrative block included a reasonably sized office for the principal, a secretary's office and two small rooms used for the heads of departments. There was a good-sized but spartan staff room in Phakamisa, and a similar room in Sizithabathele which the staff had tried to make more inviting with floral curtains, plastic chairs and a carpet. But these staffrooms were seldom used, teachers preferring to congregate in classrooms or outside during breaks. In both

schools, the 'library' seemed to consist mostly of textbooks and a limited number of used reading books donated by white schools.

Three long blocks of 24 classrooms housed the pupils — in Phakamisa there were 1086 pupils from Sub A to Std 5, and 27 teachers; in Sizithabathele, 1200 pupils from Sub A to Std 5, and 27 teachers. Quadrangles between the blocks of classrooms were tarred and used for the morning prayers, while reasonably extensive but overgrown and stony playing fields surrounded the schools. Both schools were also fenced but the access gates were nearly always open.

The fourth school, Khanyisiwe, is similar in design to Sivuyile, having been built at the same time, also with private funding. Here the central quadrangle was of hard baked earth in summer and thick slippery mud in winter. The school had not been properly fenced and was in extremely poor condition as a result of fighting between progressive 'comrades' from the adjacent squatter camp, and conservative vigilantes in 1986. People fleeing the conflict had taken shelter at the school until forced out by the police. The school had subsequently been petrol bombed, probably by vigilantes. It had not been repaired by the end of 1989, but by 1990 extensive renovations by the DET were finally underway. Still, only eight of the sixteen classrooms at the time of my research could be used in winter. The rest had gaping holes in the ceilings, blackened walls, and no doors or windows. Security was a problem according to teachers, because none of the classroom doors locked, the door handles and locks having been stolen; teachers never left anything, either in the classrooms or displayed on the walls. In 1988 there were about 700 pupils from Std 3 to Std 5 at the school. In 1989 numbers dropped to about 500, given the poor conditions at the

school, with parents preferring to place their children elsewhere if possible. There were still 17 teachers on the staff, however, despite threatened transfers by the DET.

Nearly all the pupils came from the surrounding areas, and all four schools had slightly more girls than boys. According to the principals, the social background of virtually all the pupils' parents was either 'working class' or unemployed. The deputy at Sivuyile, for example, explained that 'we've got a lot of suffering children, hence you see it is very difficult for them to wear the school uniform — they can't afford it'. Thus the children (many were without shoes or warm clothing in winter) came from poor homes and the schools provided each child with two slices of plain brown bread at breaks. At one stage they had provided soup as well but could no longer afford this.

Both Phakamisa and Sizithabathele had Student Representative Councils (SRCs) of senior pupils, who mostly acted as class monitors, but who were called on in times of crisis to share in decision making. Both schools had a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). At Phakamisa this had been operating effectively for some time, while at Sizithabathele the PTA was still new. Unusually, both principals were active members of a new progressive teachers' union, the Democratic Teachers' Union (DETU), established in 1985. The other two schools did not have either a PTA or SRC, and both principals belonged to the established and more conservative teachers' association, the Peninsula African Teachers Association (PENATA).

Specific day-to-day constraints that faced me related to factors such as inspectors (mostly their expected rather than the actual arrival),

appraisal of teachers by heads of departments, frequent examinations and tests, the presence of student teachers, absence of resources, and the organisation of the school day. Suffice to mention here that it was seldom possible to plan ahead with regard to meetings and activities. Teachers were also not keen to work after school. Time was therefore always a problem and repeatedly mentioned by teachers — time for planning, time to talk on a one-to-one basis, and even more difficult, time to meet as collaborative groups. Nevertheless, I had to learn to find a way to work with, rather than against, the often unpredictable rhythm of the school term and the constraints on teachers.

One of the features of a project operating in the townships at that time was the virtual impossibility of making arrangements by telephone (two of the schools did not have a telephone anyway, and when messages were left they were seldom passed on) or by mail (unreliable and irregular). Thus all arrangements had to be made in person by visiting the school. The disadvantage was of course the time needed to visit every school and find every teacher to make arrangements and leave resources. The advantage was the familiarity it gave me as participant observer, over three years, of the daily routines, given that I visited the schools nearly every day.

It was, then, in this historical and educational context that I worked with teachers for curriculum development. How I struggled under these specific circumstances with both greater and lesser successes, and came to understand better what it meant to work under conditions of Bantu education unfolds in the chapters which follow.

Notes

1 Other PREP activities not forming part of my research or this book included a researcher (Karen Morrison) working with teachers to trial curriculum materials developed in the pilot phase; a master's student (Lufuno Nevathalu) researching ethnographies of African primary classrooms also in 1988; and, a second master's student (Lorraine Marneweck) conducting a small-scale action research study in a fifth township school in 1989. Wendy Flanagan, senior lecturer in primary education at UCT, was overall coordinator of the project.

2 This ratio is based on every teacher teaching every period during the school day. In practice therefore classes are much larger. Class sizes at the schools in my study averaged 50-60 pupils, while in rural areas classes' numbers can be as high as 120.

3 In the light of political shifts, the NECC was renamed the National Education Coordinating Committee. It has now been disbanded altogether.

4 The Western Cape has one of the highest rates of tuberculosis in the world.

Chapter Three

Teachers' working lives

> 'You feel like there is that thing that binds you not to be open to teach what you feel or what you want' (Ruth Ndude, Sivuyile school).

This chapter begins to tease out and so understand how teachers with whom I worked, constructed themselves as subjects within different educational discourses in ways which were often disempowering, thereby also shaping the possibilities and limits for personal and curriculum change. Teachers' working lives under the controlling authority of the DET constituted part of the conditions of possibility for educational change, together with historical circumstances detailed in the previous chapter, and the action for change elaborated in the chapters which follow.

Ideology, truth, power-knowledge

What puzzled me when I first began to work with teachers was the way in which they would accept, even actively uphold at times, and yet also resist the practices and norms of Bantu education which structured their subordination as teacher-subjects in the education hierarchy. Teachers did not appear to expect consistency of themselves — condemning Bantu education but then uncritically reproducing practices in their classrooms consistent, I thought, with its intentions (harsh and arbitrary corporal punishment being an

extreme example, dreadfully dull drill and practice teaching methods another). I explained this contradiction, as follows, in terms of the reproductive effects of schooling and the concepts of ideology and hegemony.

According to reproduction theories[1], formal schooling plays a central role in legitimating the prevailing structure of society, in the case of South Africa a racial-capitalist and gendered social order which discriminates on the basis of skin colour, privileging the wealthy few over the majority of the population, and men over women. But as Giroux (1981) and others have also argued, conditions for the stable reproduction of economic, social and cultural relations through schooling are ceaselessly contested and educational reform has to be struggled for continually. Resistance thus inheres within reproduction.

At the time, I interpreted teachers' understanding of how schooling works to legitimate the prevailing order in this way:

Thesis extract

> *Given the way in which ideology incorporates the dominant view of social relations, teachers that I worked with also articulated what can be described as a partial view of bantu education. They found bantu education unacceptable ... Yet none of these teachers demonstrated more than a partial awareness of the wider reproductive functions [of capitalism] not only of bantu education, but of all apartheid education.*

This I ascribed to ideology, understood as 'false consciousness': 'as systems of representations which signify a set of relationships which are real but which hide another set of relationships between people

which are no less real' (Sharp, 1980, p. 92). Ideology 'imprisons', it produces 'inversions and distortions' (Sharp, 1980). Hegemonic ideologies (for example of race as 'real' rather than race as an 'illusion') 'saturate' our consciousness so that we come to accept our commonsense interpretations of the world, rather than ceaselessly critiquing our assumptions (Williams, 1976). The practical effect would be to reproduce race relations under apartheid in our everyday lives — we behave as if race *is* (Fine, 1990).

But this view of ideology as false consciousness also presumes both that the researcher-intellectual knows the 'truth' hidden below this false consciousness, and a fixed extra-human reality. According to Foucault (1977, 1980) it assumes the possibility of truth constituted outside the field of power[2].

As Smart (1983) explains, Foucault shifts the terms of the debate from a preoccupation with the ambiguous concept of 'ideology' and its effects to a consideration of the relations of 'truth' and 'power' which are constitutive of hegemony. What is at stake here is that every relation of knowledge and its production is a power relation:

> Power produces knowledge ... Power and knowledge directly imply each one another ... There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

Knowledge cannot be neutral, detached or objective or even emancipatory because knowledge is indissociable from regimes of power; knowledge cannot be equated with power for power-knowledge is a relationship; and 'truth' cannot control power for every society constitutes its own 'regimes of truth':

> Each society has its regimes of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish between true and false; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1980 quoted in Gore, 1993, p. 55).

Thus knowledge cannot be possible where power relations are suspended. Because its conditions of possibility include power relations and the establishment of 'regimes of truth' it is always located in a political field. Moreover, power is neither only repressive nor negative in its effects — power is also positive and productive, omnipresent but not omnipotent, exercised rather than possessed.

Power and knowledge are joined together in discourse. But discourse, understood as any regulated set of statements (Henriques *et al.*, 1984), is not reducible *only* to language and signifying practices. Discursive practices do not separate the linguistic and the social:

> ...but are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, and in patterns of general behaviours. The unity in a discourse, therefore, does not derive from the fact that it describes a 'real object', but from the social practices that actually form the object about which discourses speak. The 'social' is constituted through these practices (Weeks, 1982, p. 111).

Discourse and discursive practices are related to context so that Foucault's concept of discourse, says Barrett, 'enables us to understand how what is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence' (1991, p. 126), while the material conditions of discourse are 'institutions, political events, economic practices and processes' (Foucault, 1972).

The tracing of the conditions of possibility for any discourse cannot be internal only to that discourse. Discourses are always inscribed in relation to the production of other discourses so that every discourse is part of a 'discursive complex' (Henriques *et al.*, 1984) and every practice is by definition both material and discursive. The question, then, in trying to understand the present, is what are the historical, material and discursive conditions for the emergence of particular discourses — for example, fundamental pedagogics, or people's education, or child-centred teaching to name only a few. 'Truth', as Henriques *et al.* (1984, p. 114) say, is 'a material discursive, political and subjective question'. In Foucault's view the teachers' understandings would be shaped by different, possibly contradictory discourses, one of which would be the racist discourse of Bantu education.

In any society discourse is power because the rules determining discourse enforce norms of what is rational, sane and true, and to speak from outside these rules is to risk marginalization and exclusion. Importantly for understanding work with teachers, discourses are productive — 'discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1973 quoted in Barrett, 1991, p. 130) — the 'underachieving' or 'gifted' child, the 'disempowered' teacher, the 'disadvantaged student', and so on.

It also then follows that ideology's notion of a delusional, because non-rational and non-unitary subject, must be deconstructed and the subject and subjectivity theorised differently:

> We use subjectivity to refer to individuality and self-awareness — the condition of being a subject — but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to discourses and practices and produced by these — the condition of being subject (Henriques *et al.*, 1984 p. 3).

In this view, the unitary rational agent having some essence or core independent of experience or the social is deconstructed and consciousness is then constituted (produced), not constitutive. Subjects will take up different discourse positions as women and men, as black teachers, as principals, as members of political groupings, as husbands and wives, and so on, and at times these positions may be contradictory but not either 'true' or 'false'. The point is that 'truth' is historically and socially specific, positioning subjects in discourses which 'have powerful and "real" effects, while at the same time acknowledging that their "truth" is itself historically produced within certain specific conditions of possibility' (Walkerdine, 1986, p. 64). Foucault's analysis thus also allows for an articulation with theories of the reproductive function of formal schooling which legitimates the dominant discourses of the South African social domain, while still allowing for the tracing of those other than of racism and capitalism[3].

I now wish to tease out some of the micro-politics of Bantu education, in particular addressing teachers' working lives shaped by the dominant authoritarian education discourse of surveillance and

hierarchical control, and how teachers were moulded by the discourse of fundamental pedagogics in the specific project in which I worked. The question here is how are people formed as subjects and objects by virtue of their location within a network of positive and productive power-knowledge relations? How did teachers experience their working lives? How did they speak about the institutions (schools) that marginalised and excluded them and how might they have challenged the schooling system? Did apartheid education discourse at that time smother any possibility of resistance? Was it an unquestioned ideology operating smoothly and without any internal contradictions?

Regulative discourses

- ***Discourse of authoritarian surveillance***

On the one hand, the DET denied any antagonism between itself and teachers in its efforts to construct the educational system as a community of harmonious and shared interests between itself and the teachers. Attempts to create a hegemonic discourse under the normalizing 'gaze' of the education authorities have been traced by Hyslop (1989) in all their 'staggering crudity', at least at the level of overt cooption. One example which he cites from a March 1965 editorial in the Department's mouthpiece the *Bantu Education Journal* will suffice to illustrate such clumsy endeavours:

> It is about time that we take a look at our [sic] South African Bantu population to see in what respects they have exceptional qualities ... choral singing is one of our strong points ... Another talent which is manifested in our children is their neat handwriting ... subversive activities and

> sabotage are not our strong points. There are some of our fellow men who, following the instigation of strangers, attempted this but they were bound to fail.

By 1988 the journal had been renamed *Educamus*, the crass racist and paternalistic rhetoric modified, but not discarded. Thus, a February 1988 editorial proclaimed that teachers were now 'the indispensable partners in the challenge of education'. Given 'the political rhetoric which characterises this age', they are exhorted to throw in their lot with the DET in 'the struggle against ignorance, prejudice and greed'.

Similarly, Sam De Beer, then Deputy Minister of Education and Training, stated on 30 July 1987 to the House of Delegates that 'I wish to reaffirm our sincere and honest intentions to provide the best possible education ...' 'Common involvement' and positive relations and attitudes', he said, 'are of the utmost importance' for the Department which 'enjoys the goodwill and support of the vast majority of parents, pupils and teachers'.

The 'normal' teacher is, then, the one constructed by the DET as working with the Department for the sake of pupils and 'the community'.

But this discourse is also profoundly unequal. It has no strong concept of teachers' rights — duties are asymmetrically assigned between the DET and teachers, and the DET decides who is qualified to speak about school organisation and the curriculum. Thus in 1987, Gerrit Viljoen could present the DET as proceeding in the interests of African communities when it acted against people's education whose main goal was allegedly 'to politicize school subjects so as to turn them into an instrument for promoting

dissatisfaction ...' (*House of Assembly*, 29 July 1987). The banning of people's education and popular organisations made it clear who had the right to structure the curriculum and decide on patterns of school organisation. Teachers and communities had no independent right to speak in this discourse.

Moreover, it was teachers who had to struggle with the legacy of the deliberate political intent to stifle African pupils' potential, and the effects of decades of resistance to an illegitimate system:

- Even in high schools they say the kids, it's where they should be taught the way to choose their careers, but now when you get to high schools it's not like that, you're not guided on those lines, you are only given information and there are very few subjects you can form for your career, maybe you don't want to follow a certain trend, you want to follow this and that and those subjects are not there (Ruth Ndude, interview, 30/9/88).
- It's [Bantu education] bad because, if you can take a std 8 child, he or she cannot express himself or herself in English in front of an audience ... And yet if you go to the coloured schools or white schools you learn more things that you haven't learned. Like if you go to coloured schools you get computers and yet there are no computers in our schools (Stanley Ntamo, interview, 27/9/88).
- The pupils are not keen to learn, that is the problem we encounter, but we are teaching under those [poor] conditions (Lumka Molotsi, interview, 29/9/88).
- I don't know how I can put it because I'm not satisfied with it. I'm really not satisfied about it because you can find that our standard is not the same ... I would like the white teachers to

come inside our schools ... you see if each school will have a white lady who will deal with the lower classes, you see, just for reading (Elizabeth Mgwebu, interview, 29/9/88).

- Since the riots [1976] the children are not as they used to be ... the children are very much forgetful, they are not as careful as the other children used to be, they do not want to concentrate (Adelaide Nfomelo, interview, 28/9/88).
- The present schooling system? To me it's bad because I'm comparing it to other education departments, the coloureds and the whites. I've got kids who are in the coloured schools and when I look at their level compared to the kids I'm teaching here, they are far above, and when I look at the methods which are being used to teach them they actually open up ideas for those kids ... (Oscar Mtukiale, interview, 29/9/88).

To say the least teachers confronted a delicate situation. Not only were they critical of the existing schooling system and by implication of the DET, they were also trapped between their pupils and the community amongst whom they lived and worked on the one hand, and the state employer on the other. Teachers were seen, as Nomonde Ncube remarked, 'as one who is for the system'. While Ruth Ndude felt that 'it's not as good to be a teacher as it used to be. I think teaching in our days is not a good profession judging from what is happening outside'.

Nor should the then power of the education authorities be underestimated as an explanation of teacher self-regulation. The 'witchhunt' mentioned in the previous chapter is just one such example of the bureaucratic surveillance of teachers. Moreover, there were the coercive 'misconduct' clauses of the Education and

Training Act of 1979. 'Misconduct' includes doing, or causing to be done, or conniving at:

> ... any act which is prejudicial to the administration, discipline or efficiency of a school department, office or institution of the government ... [and] publicly, otherwise at a meeting convened by an association of teachers recognised in terms of Section 30, criticising derogatively the administration of the department (quoted in *Africa Perspective*, 1984, p. 59).

One principal, Mr Lungiswe, captured the problem as teachers perceived it: 'One has got to take it that the department does spy on you all the time to find out what you are really doing' (interview, 29/5/1988). Teachers thus felt trapped within these coercive relations which positioned them as receivers of curriculum instructions, and subjected them to pervasive control:

- The thing is the walls have ears (Stanley Ntamo, interview 27/9/88).
- We are knocking against a wall which does not allow us to do what we want to do for the upliftment of the community ... they [the government] do not want the people to get together to discuss their problems ... the problems of the location, the problems of the school (Gladstone Mashiyi, interview, 28/9/88).
- I'd say it's not good ... but we all know that you see but we have to learn what we are being told to learn (Nombulelo Singiswa, interview, 28/9/88).
- Everything changes but this education of ours doesn't change ... and at the same time if you want to do anything that is of use they [the DET] become negative, they don't sit

down and peruse that information, they just become negative to it (Veronica Khumalo, interview, 29/9/88).

- There is no freedom of teaching. It [bantu education] is stereotyped. We cannot broaden ourselves (Douglas Zihlangu, interview, 29/9/88).
- Well I think that the government is a little bit, not even a little bit, the government is not giving us enough chance to express or to give the pupils what we think they ought to get. In the first place I think, if I'm not making a mistake, it is said that the syllabus is drawn according to the cultures and what have you of a nation, but now our syllabus comes from them [government] readily prepared so that you have to stick to this. At times when you're teaching a lesson you feel like, no, this lesson it's lacking something and now you are not free to add that thing because it's a little bit political and now the kids they find that, oh you are teaching politics at the school and tell the parents, and then it goes on like that until it reaches maybe the principal and then you are for it! We are not, we are not free. We are bound by certain rules, don't do this in class, teach in this way, and even our qualifications [are inadequate] (Ruth Ndude, interview, 30/9/88).
- Hey, I would say as far as I'm concerned we are bogged down, we as teachers are not given the opportunity to take an active role because whenever we try to bring in something new, you're labelled you know, that's the problem we're having. Hence most of the teachers don't want to get themselves exposed to some of the people from outside in trying to help improve the situation. I would say if Melanie is serious in trying to help improve the situation why not go to the [DET] circuit office and say: 'It's the

system you're having is hopeless. This is what you're supposed to do.' Then we can get the change from the *top* coming right down (Oscar Mtukiale, interview, 29/9/88).

- We have our ups and downs as the year goes on. We are teaching under pressure but we carry on ... [there is] nothing we can do unless we teach the children because our aim is to educate them and make provision for their future. We don't care for other things (Alice Moisi, interview, 30/9/88).

This last comment highlights a point made forcefully by Van den Berg — education arises out of political discourse and is profoundly shaped by the dominant political discourse, which, although seemingly highly political (authoritarian, racist), tries to present a 'neutral' face in which education must be separated from politics:

> If we attempt to engage in discourse about education, and separate that from politics, we make a decision to buy into the dominant discourse ... To acquiesce in the dominant discourse about the relationship between education and politics is to accept terms of discourse loaded in favour of established practices (1986, p. 9).

But the complexity of the discursive webs and extra-discursive conditions was signalled by the fact that not all teachers accepted Alice's separation of the educational and political. For example:

> I mean the situation under which we teach is political, the mere fact that a child doesn't stay in Sea Point [a white area] but he stays in Crossroads, or New Crossroads or Guguletu [African areas] is political, so I don't think there's any teacher who can refrain from being a political teacher. All teachers are political (Oscar Mtukiale, interview, 29/9/88).

Discourse of fundamental pedagogics

Teachers had also been moulded educationally by the discourse of fundamental pedagogics, and even more than their pupils, were the products of the curriculum content and processes of Bantu education. Teachers in African schools are likely to have internalised a particular understanding of teacher behaviour shaped by their educational experiences, and which they then act out in their own classrooms. Thus teachers' professional knowledge will have been shaped in the first instance by their own experience of schooling. Unless their professional training decisively breaks with this experience, it is likely to *reinforce* dominant patterns of transmission teaching, drill and practice and rote learning.

All the teachers with whom I worked, like the majority of African teachers, had attended colleges controlled by the DET. Understanding the nature of intellectual production at these institutions means recognising firstly that Bantu education has contradictory outcomes. The student protests of 1976 are undoubtedly the most striking evidence of the *political* failure of Bantu education. Morphet (1987), however, highlights the problem when he asks whether the politicization of educational discourse meant the detrimental neglect of educational issues. Certainly Gwala argues convincingly that, while Bantu education failed politically, 'it has been relatively successful educationally by controlling and suppressing the intellectual and analytical abilities of black students' (1988, p. 172). In effect, a disabling gap existed between *political* rejection of the system and acquiescence in the form and content of the *educational process* of that same system.

The content of intellectual production in historically black universities and teacher colleges has been underpinned by the ideology of 'fundamental pedagogics' developed by Afrikaner academics to uphold 'Christian National principles', central to which is the assertion of segregation and white superiority (see Enslin, 1984 and 1988). But such bluntness of racial purpose needs to disguise itself under the cloak of scientific objectivity. According to fundamental pedagogics educational theory is a 'science' and must strive to be 'value free' in establishing 'universally valid' knowledge about education. So political questions are not involved in understanding education. The 'value-free' examination of education, however, always asserts the importance of relating education back to the 'values of society' which are seen as unchanging and pre-given. In this way apartheid and segregated education are justified as reflecting the 'scientifically' analysed 'values of society' (see Beard and Morrow, 1981; Enslin, 1984 and 1988; Unterhalter and Wolpe, 1989). As Enslin (1988) points out, far from fundamental pedagogics being in retreat, the majority of teachers, and the vast majority of African teachers, are products of institutions in which fundamental pedagogics has been the sole theoretical discourse, devoid of hope and possibility, through which to understand schooling in South Africa.

Furthermore, fundamental pedagogics encapsulates an authoritarian conception of education in which the child (or student teacher) 'must be moulded and inculcated into an attitude of obedience and submission towards the instruments and figures of authority' thereby making 'the coercive actions of both the teachers and the State correct and right by definition' (Parker, 1981, p. 27). The child is viewed as 'immature', needing to be guided towards maturity by

the teacher as authority figure. De Vries (1986) explains that the child 'is still dependent, in need of help and seeking help because he [sic] is incompetent, ignorant, unskillful, irresponsible and undisciplined' (quoted in Enslin, 1988, p. 69). Pedagogical relationships are unquestioningly asymmetrical and 'closed' (Muir, 1981), the child's duty being to obey the teachers' God-given authority. Simons (1986) points out that this view of teaching 'reverberates' through many of the prescribed and recommended books in African teacher training colleges, finding concrete expression in 'hundreds of lessons' presented by teachers and student teachers in African schools.

Not surprisingly, then, the educational process in African teacher training for PREP teachers (as in African schools) was dominated by dictated notes and rote reproduction of these notes rather than by the critical exchange of ideas. Teacher education thus perpetuated conservative traditions of white domination and black subordination, leading Simons to conclude that:

> On the whole, the education that black student-teachers receive deliberately obscures the historically contingent and political nature of education. This in turn, does not equip teachers to interpret the ideologically loaded syllabus which they have to teach ... On an even more fundamental level it goes without saying that the rotten system of Apartheid education has produced teachers who are simply underqualified to teach subjects for which they have received inadequate or no training (1986, p. 282).

Moreover, claims Gwala (1988), graduates of Afrikaans-medium universities, themselves trained in fundamental pedagogics,

predominated on the teaching staff of many African colleges and universities. Whether fairly or not, some teachers perceived their lecturers as incompetent, holding their jobs because they were white Afrikaners. As one of the teachers I worked with commented:

> Our training colleges, they say they have qualified lecturers but at times you could see that this person, no he's not qualified, it seems as if he's just a person who is taken from somewhere (Ruth Ndude, interview, 30/9/88).

While another teacher remarked:

> The lecturer who presented pedagogics was really boring because we found out later that he was an outcast, a failure in the field, he couldn't shape up in the practice so he applied for a post in the college, and because he was a boer [Afrikaner], he was given the post to teach education (David Bangeni, interview, 27/9/88).

Furthermore, in Gwala's view, even African staff at these colleges and bantustan universities are the product of the same philosophical approach to education.

* *Teacher qualifications discourse*

Teachers were further disempowered by their undeserved labelling as 'underqualified'. Like 89% of African teachers in 1987 (SAIRR, 1989, p. 273), most of the 34 teachers I worked with would have been described in this way. Only eight were 'qualified' according to the prevailing state criteria enforced from 1983 that matriculation plus three years post matric training is the basis for 'qualified' status. Most of the project teachers had Std 8 (ten years of schooling)

followed by a two-year Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC). As one project teacher remarked:

> Bantu education? No, it's bad, we don't like it ... because they killed us ... look now, PTC [Primary Teachers' Certificate] is not recognised, whereas they said we must do the PTC and they said after standard eight we may take, we may continue with the teachers' course that was PTC then, now we are forced to have matric (Thandie Pahlana, interview, 27/9/88).

Nor was there a developed tradition of in-service training for these underqualified African teachers. Teachers in the project were mostly unfamiliar with the concept, and even the term, 'in-service'. Ten of the 34 project teachers had never been on an in-service course. Of those teachers who had attended courses on topics such as teacher etiquette, community councils and a management course, comments varied from the course being 'a waste of time', 'nothing new', 'not helpful at all'. The most popular courses were not in-service at all, but week-long residential sports coaching courses. Bearing in mind that these took place during term time and that no supply cover was provided so that children were left untaught, the waste in terms of money and teaching time seemed appalling.

Informal conversations with principals suggested that they found such courses disruptive. Usually they were informed at the last minute and 'instructed' to send a certain number of teachers who were then absent from the school for the duration of the course. Furthermore these courses carried no accreditation or financial reward.

The point here is that the low opinion of INSET further complicated my own work where teachers did not see in-service involvement as part of their professional lives, and where their experience of INSET

had been mostly such that they expected to be told what and how to teach.

- ***School-based control discourse***

At another level of control, syllabuses were centrally prescribed for all schools, textbooks were chosen and supplied by the education authorities, and work programmes prescribed what each teacher should do during every period throughout the whole year. Add to all this, teachers whose only educational experience at schools and colleges had been Bantu education, and a state of emergency from 1985-1990, and the extent of the difficulties facing teachers in my study becomes apparent.

Two of the four schools, Phakamisa and Sizithabathele, claimed to operate democratically in that staff were consulted about matters such as whether or not to stream pupils, whether or not to participate in a project, and so on. Yet even in these schools, teachers felt constrained by the hierarchical form of organisation. At one of the other schools, Khanyisiwe, the situation was worse. Teachers commented on the lack of consultation with staff:

> It's hard for a teacher to express himself you know, a teacher doesn't feel free to say a word in something. I think maybe he's afraid of the principal, you find that sometimes our principals are so hard on us, even if you want to say something he thinks that you want to take over the school (Nomonde Ncube, interview, 27/4/1989).

Her colleague confirmed the undemocratic way in which their school was run:

> If the principal wants to decide upon what's to be done, then he's going to have a problem because if he's calling a meeting, and in that meeting he wants something to be discussed, everybody will be quiet because he's the last man to give the answer (Gladstone Mashiyi, interview 26/4/89).

Still it was not always clear to me, especially not at first, how 'real' the controls were on what and how teachers taught. Yet as I was to learn, teachers did experience pressure to complete the syllabus. While there appeared to be no prescriptions regarding the methods teachers might use, in practice long syllabi and prescribed readers effectively limited innovative teaching styles.

Principals and heads of departments seemed to check from time to time that the syllabus was being completed and the work plan adhered to, even at the more democratically run schools. At Phakamisa, John Mzhikhona explained that he had dropped out after the first year of involvement in my research because 'if I attend a course, sometimes I'm lagging behind the syllabus, so the headmaster he quarrels for that you know' (interview 13/3/89). A junior primary colleague at the same school, commenting on another teacher's reluctance to deviate from the prescribed class reader noted:

> Well I won't blame her because she knows that here at school at certain periods or certain times, the principal or the h.o.d., she goes from class to class asking where are you with the book now, and if you're behind they write it down, she gives a report and it goes in your file (Leah Mkhize, interview, 17/10/88).

Bulelwa Kgaze asserted that 'in black schools we are forced to complete the syllabus' (Bulelwa Kgaze, interview, 29/9/88).

Teachers from the other schools articulated similar problems with completing the prescribed syllabus. Gladstone Mashiyi thought that introducing alternative content in history lessons would 'be a little bit time consuming because you find yourself short in finishing the syllabus' (discussion 13/10/88). His first concern was how to get through the syllabus. A colleague agreed that she taught 'according to the syllabus' because 'sometimes there's a lot of work to be done so we pass on whether the children have understood or not, we've got to rush for their final exams in November' (Nombulelo Singiswa, interview, 28/9/88). A teacher from Sizithabathele claimed that 'if I'm found teaching a thing which is not on the syllabus, is out of the syllabus, or political I get arrested!' (Stanley Ntamo, interview, 27/9/88).

All project teachers expressed similar concerns. They were particularly aware of syllabus constraints and were unwilling to deviate much without the sanction of the principal and the DET.

Yet inspectors seldom visited these primary schools unless they had received information of an impending stayaway by teachers and/or pupils. Instead, much of the control and evaluation functions of inspectors had in fact devolved onto the school administration, that is the principal and heads of departments. One deputy principal explained that inspectors visited only to deal with administrative matters and 'they don't worry themselves with what's taking place in class'.

Moreover, that teachers had been victimised more for their political activities than for what they do in their classrooms was hardly the

point. The issue at stake was that teachers and principals had, to a greater or lesser degree, effectively internalised at least some of the control and surveillance functions of the DET. As Zolani Njoko observed 'do not ask them [principals] about the new methods, and also my principal fears that the Department will come and say, no, you are doing this and that and that and that' (interview 28/9/88). Rather the point is how teachers (and principals and heads of departments) perceived bureaucratic surveillance and internalised these controls to regulate and discipline themselves.

- ***Resource constraints discourse***

Of course a major constraint on any innovative INSET work was the shocking lack of resources in African schools — large classes of up to 50 or more pupils, overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of textbooks, inadequate buildings, shortages of paper and printing facilities, even of chalk:

> The situation of our school is not quite, because we are worried about the buildings of our schools. Even if you are trying to do your best, when you are in such a dull school you can't do quite a good education in such a condition ... The school should be renovated (Nomonde Ncube, interview, 28/9/88).

At one of the schools, the Std 5 English teacher was distressed that she was having to use the Std 4 reader again. Understandably the pupils were bored. Her colleague complained that 'the facilities that we have are very poor, they are dragging us behind' (Ruth Ndude, interview, 30/9/88). Another colleague noted that 'we haven't got the material, that's our main problem, we have got nothing in the school' (Gloria Hewu, interview, 8/9/87). Khanyisiwe, as explained

in the introduction, was in particularly poor condition after community conflicts in 1986. Two teachers at the school commented:

- We don't have enough books, the grammar book is the only copy I have this year ... it's difficult for us to write all the time on the blackboard (Nomonde Ncube, interview, 20/4/89).

- This type of thing that we are in is not very motivating. For an example, now I'm busy making some sketches for health education but I haven't got a place to keep them. After school I just put them in my [car] boot and go, just take everything home ... this school needs to be renovated. At the same time we should be supplied with sufficient books, we haven't got prescribed books here, we haven't got overheads, we have got nothing, you just get in class empty-handed with your record book, that's all (Gladstone Mashiyi, interview, 26/4/89).

While the other two schools were better supplied with textbooks, even so there were not enough class readers for all the pupils. Teachers were issued with one set of textbooks to use in all the classes, and it was *never* possible for a pupil to take a textbook home.

Counter discourses: Teachers and educational change

Acceptance of their conditions of work by teachers did not then mean 'false consciousness', as I had first argued. Reviewing all this data suggests rather that teachers were indeed conscious of the conditions under which they worked, the circumstances of their lives, the surrounding poverty, and the inconsistencies of the

dominant discourse (caring on the one hand, repressive surveillance and control on the other).

Teaching as it was then structured under the DET operated to disempower teachers at all levels. They had little control over the syllabus or the textbooks or their work plans. Teachers' exclusion from the conceptual functions of their work might be called a process of 'ideological proletarianisation' or 'deskilling' (Apple, 1982; Sarup, 1984; Lawn and Ozga, 1988). Planning of the curriculum is undertaken by outside experts and encapsulated in curriculum packages or, more commonly in South African schools, in prescribed textbooks. The teacher's function is a technical one: to execute the materials as designed by the officially approved experts.

Teachers (and their principals) internalised many, perhaps most of the controls, constructing themselves as teacher subjects in ways which were profoundly disempowering. And they worked within a system in which surveillance, while intermittent and uneven, was nevertheless real. All of this made it difficult to develop a view of teachers as participants in the shaping of the curriculum as I had hoped, and as action research advocated as a cornerstone of its educational purpose.

- ***Professional development discourse***

Thus one of the key arguments advanced for action research has been that it contributes to teachers 'professional' development. Stenhouse, for example, elaborated the idea of 'extended professionalism' which involves:

> The commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development;

> The commitment and the skills to study one's own teaching;
> The concern to test theory in practice by the use of those skills (1975, p. 144).

In short, he argues:

> the outstanding characteristic of the extended professional is the capacity for autonomous professional self-development through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom research procedures (1975, p. 144).

How was teachers' professional development to be supported under conditions of Bantu education?

In supporting the need for professional development, I did not regard this as necessarily 'a petit-bourgeois strategy for advancing and defending a relatively privileged position' (Finn *et al.*, 1978, p. 167). Experience elsewhere suggests that 'professionalism' is neither wholly reactionary nor necessarily progressive, but should be historically located in specific contexts and specific struggles over education (see Lawn and Ozga, 1988). Thus in township schools, it seemed to me that it was precisely this professionalism which might bring teachers into conflict with the education authorities. Indeed Connell *et al.* (1982) argue that professionalism, by encouraging autonomy and innovation, may well be a powerful opponent of bureaucratic control. This seemed the more so in the case of the DET where, as Hartshorne (1988) observed, teachers were not treated as professionals, but as instruments of policy. Understood this way, attempts to foster teachers' professionalism through action research and teacher-led curriculum development would be counter-hegemonic to the ethos of Bantu education which neither respected persons

— whether teachers, pupils or parents — nor demonstrated any regard for their judgement.

* ***Human agency discourse***

But is resistance to subjection within a discourse possible? Davies explicates how subjects are constituted within discursive practices:

> The newly emerging view is that in learning to talk, and thus to use the discursive practices that are available within their social world, each person gains access to what it means to be a person within each of the discourses available to them, and in practicing them becomes the kind of speaker who is implicated and made sense of through such practices (1991, p. 342).

Moreover we each bring our accumulated personal histories, a sense of what we may say and do as persons who can or cannot be positioned in that way. Nor are all discursive practices available to each of us. The pupils, for example, cannot speak in the way the teacher does, nor black teachers take the position of the white facilitator. Davies further explicates this concept of 'positioning':

> It replaces the old concept of role which was too static to capture the fluid nature of social reality. In conversation with each other we draw on different discourses, each with their own assumptions, explanatory frameworks and particular relevances ... In the way I take up these various discourses, I will also be positioning or attempting to position my hearers — that is as people who share my way of seeing the world or as people who are judged lacking within such a discourse. Whenever we speak we are positioning and being

> positioned and we move from one position to another in the ebb and flow of any conversation, as we move from one discursive practice to another, one audience to another, one set of relevancies, and so on (1991, p. 361).

If the individual subject is not a product of a single discourse, not imprisoned within dominant meanings, but is in a sense 'inter-discursive', then the potential is established for challenging and reversing forms of subject definition and deploying one system of meaning against another (Weeks, 1982).

This argument opens the space for a conception of teachers as agents, supported further by Davies' (1991) challenge to Walkerdine and Lucey's argument that the idea of individual freedom or agency is a middle class liberal humanist sham perpetrated by middle class mothers who teach their children the illusion of choice: the definition of agency which assumes that to be a person is to have agency. She rejects this in favour of agency as contingent and discursively constructed as a positioning made available to some but not to others. Because subjects are constituted through discursive practices and can only speak from the positions made available within those discourses, there are then discursive practices which make it not thinkable for them to take up themselves as agents, for example the authoritarian surveillance discourse of Bantu education.

The point is, says Davies, that it is 'not a *necessary* element of human action to be agentic, it is a *contingent* element, depending on the particular discursive practices in use and the positioning of the person in those practices' (author's emphasis, p. 344). For example, the position of agent had been available to me in my own teaching career as a skilled, relatively well qualified history teacher in a

coloured school where the principal did not support the heavy handed bureaucracy of the controlling education authority.

What I simply did not grasp at first in PREP was that access to an alternative pedagogical discourse was not *necessarily* available to teachers in Bantu education, given that agency is a matter of position or location within or in relation to particular discourses. How that agency is taken up depends on the way in which one has discursively constructed oneself as a moral being, the degree of commitment to that construction, the alternative discursive structures available to one, as well as one's own subjective history informing one's emotions and attitudes to agentic and non-agentic positions (Davies, 1991).

What became increasingly clear while I worked with teachers, were the structural constraints on teachers taking up positions as 'professionals'. This was rather different from staff and curriculum development initiatives in England, the USA and Australia where there have been shifts over the last three decades (see Rubin, 1987) from top down models of change which bypassed teachers, to models of change which now recognise the contribution of teachers to curriculum design and development. Similar views of teachers, as this chapter makes clear, never prevailed in Bantu education. Far from teachers being deskilled in recent years as Apple (1992) argues the case for the USA, teachers in Bantu education had *always* been the receivers and implementers of curriculum.

While it would be foolhardy to claim that teachers had accepted this unproblematically (see Hyslop, 1989 for example), nonetheless after four decades of Bantu education it would seem that teachers' voices and knowledges had been subjugated and marginalised in

curriculum policy, planning and development. The point is there was no counter discourse in which teachers could take up a different subject position of curriculum developer and professional. Mr Lungiswe captured the dilemma in changing things when he said: 'I would say one would never understand it [bantu education] until one is in a position to compare it or to know about the other [white] system of education' (interview 29/5/88).

The question of human agents and change, of the dialectic of structure and agency is of course very complicated. To be sure, Davies (1991) warns of the extreme complexity in carrying off one's wish that teachers (learners) should be agentic. Notwithstanding this caution, the chapters which follow might be read for evidence (or not) of teachers taking up the position of agent, and not only being controlled through the practices and structures of the institution and the 'system'.

- ***Personal meaning-making discourse***

In the end, I find it difficult to abandon all notions of human agents as both constituting as well as constituted. Thus I still find Fullan's (1982) emphasis on the personal *meaning-making* by participants in the change process useful, i.e. how participants actually experience and commit to change, rather than how the change was intended to be experienced. Fullan cites Marris (1975) to support his thesis that people need to attach personal meaning to experience. Thus educational change is about the making of personal meaning:

> No one can resolve the crisis of reintegration on behalf of another. Every attempt to preempt conflict, argument, protest by rational planning, can only be abortive: however reasonable the proposed changes, the process of implement-

> ing them must still allow the impulse of rejection to play itself out. When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they only have to explain. and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes, and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate. If they deny others the chance to do the same, they treat them as puppets dangling by the threads of their own conceptions (quoted in Fullan, 1982, p. 25).

In a similar argument MacDonald and Walker (see Walker, *et al.*, 1976) claim that a project design cannot be imposed or transferred to the blank sheet of classrooms and schools but rather enters 'a complex dynamic of pre-established values, conflicts and individual rights and duties' (1976, p. 25).

This would be even more so given Nias's finding that teachers' personal and professional selves are inseparable so that 'who and what people perceive themselves to be matters as much as what they do' (1987, p. 184). For teachers, this means that a challenge to their work practices is easily construed as an attack on themselves.

Still, I also recognise that this humanist formulation, which sees the individual as the agent of change and the producer of knowledge is limited as a comprehensive explanation. While beliefs and desires may explain actions, it is the social domain, structured through difference and hierarchy, which helps explain why subjects think and want what they do. Beliefs are formed by practices. Thus I do

not wish to argue that explanation is ultimately reducible to individual level explanations. On the other hand, as Wright *et al.* succinctly state: 'If there were no people there would be no societies' (1992, p. 115). The issue, then, is how to develop a critical reflexivity by linking the individual level of practice and analysis — the 'micro-pathways' — with macro-level social analysis to understand how the social speaks at the level of curriculum practice. My attempts to do this remain imperfect at best, however. My claim is only to reflect on my own participation in regimes of truth, explored in the next two chapters, and to generate historically and socially contextualised local knowledge about new forms of curriculum development which shift subjugated knowledge from the margins closer to the centre.

* *Fashioning 'good sense' out of 'common sense'*

In analysing my work with teachers in terms of the conditions of possibility for the interruption of power relations, for the emergence of subjugated knowledge, and for curriculum change, I find Walkerdine sums up how we might approach 'the sites and possibility of our subjugation and of our resistance':

> We might then adopt a double strategy: one which recognizes and examines the effects of normative models, whilst producing the possibility of other accounts and other sites for identification ... a working with and through an exploration of both our own formation in all its historical specificity and the formation of other possibilities of practice, as well as locations from which to struggle within existing ones. Thus, a working within those apparatuses of our present means not only our attempts at deconstruction

> but the possibilities of explorations which do not seek a knowledge which claims itself as true for all peoples, places, times (1990, p. 57).

The crucial point surely, is that individuals (facilitators, teachers, pupils) can resist dominant subject positions and develop counter and reverse discourses of subjugated knowledges and alternative pedagogical discourse, even where they might lack the social power to realize their versions of knowledge.

How, then, might one develop new ways of thinking about teacher identity, not for example as the isolated individual? How might one legitimate teachers' right to speak about the curriculum? What is at stake is the possibility of resistance and improvement and of marginalised discourses coming to constitute new regimes of truth.

Moreover this accords with Gramsci's (1971) notion of 'common-sense' and 'good sense' which, as Cocks explains, does away with 'any sharp divorce between the two politically significant forms of subaltern consciousness' (1989, p. 83). The common does not exclude the good and the good can be made out of what is common:

> It is the porosity of 'commonness' and 'goodness' on which Gramsci counts when he asserts that the practical task of critical theory is to begin always with the common sense and cultivate the elements of good sense studded through it, in order to fashion a new common sense which is altogether good (Cocks, 1989, p. 83-84).

Notes

1 For accounts of the connection between schooling as a site for cultural and social reproduction see, for example. Bowles and Gintis 1976, Dale *et al.*, 1976, Apple 1979, Sharp 1980, Giroux 1981, Kallaway, 1984 and Nasson 1990a and 1990b.

2 Foucault would also take issue with reproduction theories which privilege the economic order and the economic as the determining feature in-the-last-instance. Displacing relations of production by relations of power remains an unresolved problem for me despite the argument by Henriques *et al.* (1984) addressing criticism of the absence of any theory of global changes in this analysis:

> First, it enables one to examine the mechanism of discursive practices at the micro-level of detailed calculations which are part of the processes of production of the discourses and practices in question. Such an analysis tends to support the kind of history of knowledge which shows that the process of production of knowledge is uneven, full of inconsistencies, failures, new beginnings, changes in direction and unpredictable outcomes. Nevertheless it would be impossible to establish dependencies among discursive practices if regularities did not exist. The examination of conditions of possibility indicates what the limits are, what is sayable and what may happen. It therefore helps in the analysis of the more global level. The latter task does require other propositions, for example, about capitalism, in order to give shape to the task of genealogy' (1984, p. 109).

As Best and Kellner point out, a polymorphous analysis of power 'occludes the extent to which power is still controlled and administered by specific and identifiable agents in positions of economic and political power ...'(1991, p. 70).

Moreover, how do multiple local opposition movements link together into a counter-hegemonic bloc?

3 Although this hardly means hastily jettisoning and even silencing class as a powerful analytic category, as seems to be the case under current conditions. Again, the unresolved tension surfaces, one which can possibly be traced throughout my text, of reconciling the emancipatory intentions of my own project (a critical pedagogy and democratic action research) and the relatavism and quietism of some forms of postmodern analysis.

Chapter Four

Reflections on power

'Why doesn't this feel empowering?' (Ellsworth, 1989)

As pointed out in the introduction, this is a story of development, not least my own as a facilitator of teachers' learning. Moreover, as an insider action researcher I am part of the action, not distant or disembodied. So this is a reflexive story — the teller is in the tale. It is then entirely consistent for me to revisit the assumptions underpinning my work in PREP.

Moreover, my account has been constructed around a series of 'reflections' rather than as a seamless chronology. In choosing this approach, I have attempted to highlight a number of critical lessons in revisiting my earlier work and writing, to capture in some small measure the messiness and non-linearity of all practical work, and also to show how this reflective document is grounded empirically in documentation and systematic analysis.

When I wrote my doctoral thesis I conceptualised my work with teachers as turning on binary oppositions, namely two central dilemmas: the tension between my intention to act democratically and the teachers' expectations that I would take an interventionist role; and that of reform versus transformation of the form and content of the curriculum. As I then understood my own practice, the former dilemma centred on how the teachers might learn about alternative methods and theories of teaching practice within a context of participative and democratic working relations.

In revisiting this work, a number of themes have been teased out and my earlier construction (the thesis) has been analysed according to these, rather than only one overarching dilemma as in the thesis account, even though this dilemma still holds explanatory power for my work. My intention has been to deconstruct my own earlier assumptions about 'learner-centred' teacher education, and the 'myths' of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989); to understand its humanist and repressive traces, yet without abandoning the possibility of teachers as agents; and to locate all this in the relations of power exercised in the interaction of myself and the teachers with whom I worked.

The questions then become: what are/were the conditions of possibility that might allow for the emergence of new knowledges or counter discourses of INSET and curriculum, and for teachers taking agentic positions? What was the nature of the power-knowledge relations (Foucault, 1977; 1980) exercised in my work with teachers? What possibility was there for the disruption (or not) of relations of power between myself and the teachers? Might action researchspeak to the educator's 'voyeurism' identified by Ellsworth (1989) by problematising one's own role as the teacher/professor/facilitator?

Descriptive overview of my involvement with teachers in four schools, 1987-1989

I began my work in PREP in March 1987, meeting first with the principal of Sivuyile, followed by the staff as a whole, and finally with a group of five English teachers whom the principal had decided should work with me — two teachers from Std 3, two from

Std 4 and one from Std 5. These teachers all said they wished to improve the children's spoken English (the medium of instruction from Std 3), and we decided to focus on the weekly 'oral' lesson. I brought materials to the school, teachers selected from these, and we planned lessons which they were then to teach. Only the Std 3 teachers did not try out lessons, asking rather that I present a lesson which was then videotaped and discussed with the group.

Tension had emerged by June, grounded in teachers' resentment that their expectations were not being met, and we revised the project in accordance with what they said they wanted. I then spent a school term working only with five Std 3 teachers. I prepared and taught History lessons, at their request — they observed, we discussed the lessons, and four of them went on to try some of the lessons with their own classes. Thereafter I interviewed them all individually to talk about these experiences. This brought our work together to an end because the school had decided that in the following year (1988) I should work with the Std 4 teachers.

At the beginning of 1988, four more schools were approached and three agreed to participate. All had hosted UCT Bachelor of Primary Education student-teachers for teaching practice. At one time and another they had all sent pupils to UCT for micro-teaching lessons. At each school, I first outlined the project to the principal. Three of the four principals agreed to allow me to speak to teachers, whereas the fourth was not at all keen (teachers were not in a 'good spirit', the principal said) and I abandoned efforts to involve this school. At the other three schools, Phakamisa, Sizithabathele and Khanyisiwe, each principal set up a meeting with the staff at which I informed teachers about PREP and my role in the project. This was followed about a week later by a meeting with interested teachers who

identified the aspects of their teaching which they wanted to improve. In all, 28 teachers from the four schools indicated an interest in PREP, and I went on to work with 26 of them.

The way in which teachers became involved varied: at Phakamisa and Khanyisiwe it was left to the teachers to decide; at Sizithabathele I was told that a school decision had identified problem areas in Stds 3-5, so that the teachers of those subjects were then automatically involved in the project (and others excluded); and at Sivuyile, the Std 4 teachers were automatically involved in 1988 (and the Std 5 teachers in 1989). Standards taught ranged from Sub B to Std 5, and our focus became the teaching of reading and History, as requested by the teachers themselves.

Reflections I: Facilitation as a form of 'critical pedagogy'

Ellsworth's (1989) description of critical pedagogy resonates with the assumptions of PREP, and with my view at that time of 'democratic facilitation' and of first and second-order reflection on practice. She explains:

> ... critical pedagogy supported classroom analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, silencing of marginalized voices, and authoritarian social structures. Its critique was launched from the position of the 'radical' educator who recognizes and helps students recognize and name injustice, who empowers students to act against their own and others' oppressions (including oppressive school structures), who criticizes and transforms his or her own understanding in response to the understanding of students. The goal of critical pedagogy was a critical democracy,

> individual freedom, social justice and social change ... (1989, p. 300).

Furthermore, drawing on Ellsworth's analysis, Deacon and Parker (1993) have identified PREP as an example of what they call the 'critical model' which they suggest:

> ... takes the position that democratic procedures of participation and critical self-reflection at the very least mitigate the effects of teacher-learner inequalities and empower learners to speak and act for themselves, either directly or indirectly through the medium of the teacher (1993, p. 134).

But Ellsworth's (1989) critique of critical pedagogy turns on its rationalist assumptions, underpinned by the repressive myths of 'empowerment', 'student voice', 'dialogue', and even the term 'critical', all of which silence differences (of race, gender, and so on) between educator and educated. The domesticating effects perpetuate rather than challenge relations of domination and the hierarchical relationship that obtains. What is at stake, argues Ellsworth, is 'whether or how the practices [critical pedagogy] prescribed actually alter specific power relations outside or inside schools' (p. 301). Power itself becomes the 'antagonist', and she cites Minh-ha (1986/87): 'any group-any position — can move into the oppressor role'; and Mary Gentile (1985): 'everyone is someone else's Other' (p. 322).

Thus returning to my account of my work with teachers means problematising in new ways the production of knowledge about teacher development processes, now using the analytical tools of 'power-knowledge' outlined in the previous chapter. Above all, I

wish to explore the oppressive effects of my emancipatory discourse and critical pedagogy's regime of truth, which turns on the critical pedagogue occupying two key discursive positions constructed for herself 'namely origin of what can be known and origin of what can be done' (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 323). Gore, describes this as 'the essentialising of the critical pedagogy regime' where the critical pedagogue is 'all knowing, beyond racism, sexism, and all other oppressions' (1993, p. 117). In short, the theorist/facilitator/researcher assumes that she knows what is empowering and what are the appropriate alternative pedagogical practices.

Reflections II: 'Power with'

But knowledge of teacher education is produced within conditions of possibility which include relations of power. We cannot eradicate power relations through personal harmony, while compliance is still a relation of power. This was signalled but not developed in my thesis:

Thesis extracts

1 *Only retrospectively do I understand the difficulties of developing an in-service teacher education project based on a 'power with' model of working in a 'power over' society'.*

2 *... emancipation involves struggling against the structures which hold current relations of power in place.*

Arguably, my present understanding is more nuanced in its more rigorous analysis of my own implication in oppressive power relations through my adherence to a singular interpretation of an emancipatory model of working with teachers. Even though over

time I came to recognise the fantasy of working 'non-directively' with teachers, and to acknowledge my own role as a *teacher*, which I conceptualised as a democratic attitude to my own directiveness (Freire and Shor, 1987), the silence in the thesis turns on what Ellsworth (1989) has identified as the 'repressive myths' of a critical pedagogy.

For Ellsworth, this model of educational practice embodies a myth of the ideal, essentially rational person whose effects are to regulate conflict and the power to speak, to conceal differences and inequalities between participants, all in the name of rational analysis and dialogue. In all this education is a paternalistic and 'voyeuristic' project which fails to problematise the voice of the teacher/professor/facilitator.

Bernstein (1990) helps in understanding two further problem areas relating to a 'power with' notion (comparable to his concept of an 'invisible pedagogy') of practice in its claim to override the authority of the teacher. On the one hand, the teacher's authority may not be solely located in external power relations (apartheid, patriarchy, and so on) but also in the 'pedagogical device' (Bernstein, 1990) itself. Bernstein argues as follows: pedagogic discourse 'is the rules of specialised communication through which pedagogic subjects are selectively created' (1990, p. 183). It always comprises an instructional discourse which transmits skills of various kinds, and a regulative discourse which establishes the conditions for a social (racial, gendered, classed) and moral order, relation and identity in such a way that the regulative discourse always dominates the instructional discourse. The pedagogic discourse 'is the rules for embedding instructional discourse in a regulative discourse' (Bernstein, 1990, p. 188).

In the case of the social relations of facilitator and teacher the regulative rules of communication, space, sequencing and pacing of the INSET project serve to establish and maintain the authority of the facilitator's position and the teachers as the acquirers of whatever the facilitator has to offer. These interactive practices in turn are regulated by the social relations of the school and the wider society, and as we have seen from the previous chapter these comprised authoritarian discourses of hierachy, surveillance and control and entrenched apartheid policies of racial and class difference. These were obviously at odds with my expressed support for teachers having space and freedom to construct their own texts under a miminum of external constraint. To be sure, this could not be where the whole school relations were not a focus of challenge, and where repressive political conditions made collective political action difficult if not impossible. The question remains, and is explored in this and subsequent chapters: what could then be changed?

Thus facilitation is a *pedagogical* act in an institutional setting where some of the problem of power is located in the pedagogy itself. To claim 'authority/power with' relations would be to deny the institutional location of the pedagogical encounter which comprises its own regime of truth of moral supervision (transformation for example is a value-laden and hence a moral enterprise) and supervision (to what extent were teachers transformed). There is, as Gore (1993) points out, a limited range of pedagogical strategies (group work, lecturing, discussion, and so on) regardless of what teaching approach one advocates. The pedagogic objective is always improvement (however that might be understood) and practices all include surveillance/supervision and labelling.

Gore's insights are worth quoting at length for the light they cast on my own educational practices, tensions, and dilemmas:

> The teacher cannot simply attempt to abolish his or her authority by maintaining an experiential realm in which 'shared' narratives are assumed to equalize participants, or which, because the teacher and students learn from each other, is assumed to be a reciprocal enterprise. Nor can the teacher simply do away with the repressive potential of his or her authority within a rhetoric of commitment to democratic relations both inside the classroom and outside. Attempts to do so are indicative of conceptions of power as property (which can simply be done away with) and power as *either* repressive *or* productive. Given this perspective on pedagogy the teacher might do better to acknowledge and admit his or her exercise of authority vis-a-vis specific intentions — sometimes emancipatory, sometimes repressive, sometimes both, sometimes neither (author's emphasis 1993, p. 125-126).

For me the problem is still how to retain an optimistic belief in an (if not the) emancipatory project in ways which nonetheless recognise that no pedagogical practice is either inherently liberating or oppressive. The danger would be to collapse into a radical postmodern relativism where anything goes in working with teachers or in classrooms, where any one way of teaching is as useful, good, relevant as any other. This sidesteps the critical issue of how teachers trained and schooled under apartheid education might imagine and so practice alternatives where they have had no access to modern models of quality education. In our particular context we indeed need the pedagogy of the best argument.

Reflections III: A 'learner-centred approach

Thesis extract

> *The change I was interested in supporting was change in the context of the school's reality, rather than some ideal form which would neither survive nor be possible in the context of average township classrooms.*
>
> *My practice was informed by a theory of learning that one cannot learn for others (although one can learn from others), that learners should take responsibility for their own learning and exercise control over what they choose to learn, and the direction of that learning. What I had hoped was that my work would enhance the teachers' self-directedness as learners, with the facilitator acting as resource and guide. Furthermore, the view of knowledge encapsulated in action researchis one of knowledge as process rather than product. Freire's view of the act of knowing is similar to the action researchprocess when he explains that the 'act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action' (1985, p. 50). The acquisition of knowledge should be an active process since, as the previous chapter pointed out, hegemony is the result of lived social relationships and not only ideas. At the heart of this view is one of learners as active agents shaping their own working lives. I intended to develop a critical approach to facilitation which would be broadly similar and therefore chose a learner-centered strategy.*

What this extract failed to acknowledge is that notions of self-directed learning are historically specific truth claims. A learner-centred approach assumes a greater responsiveness to learner needs

but this in itself constructs learners in particular ways (Edwards, 1991) — the individual at the heart of the learning process — and subordinates the learner to power relations which mould the individual as the primary identity of persons, at the expense of the collective. Self-direction can reduce interdependence and collective action, while felt 'needs' are always shaped in a particular context (Brookfield, 1993). It also generates a pathological view of the learners who need 'fixing' to be better individuals (and better teachers). The teacher who is not active, motivated, self-directed, and capable of rational argument is pathologized and ends up blaming or being blamed for failure. Similarly, the facilitator understands her failure (or success) in developing autonomous learners as a personal and individual matter, rather than one located in historical conditions of possibility of which her own education biography and teaching skill would be only one thread.

The thesis extract also signals my humanist assumptions, underpinned by an optimistic view of adult learners who, if the proper conditions can only be established, will all take responsibility for their own learning and become effective self-directed learners (Foley, 1992).

Reflections IV: My 'learner-centred' 'critical pedagogy' in action

Field note, 4 March 1987

I met the principal from Sivuyile today. He welcomed me warmly, and said he had already discussed the project with his staff. He agreed that I could meet with them to outline the project and follow this up with a meeting with five of the teachers whom he had identified to work with me. All of them are English teachers

so the school must understand this as a project to improve the children's English but I said I thought we might look at the teaching of other subjects as well as pupils learnt these through the medium of English. What expectations are there of the project by staff at the school? Are immediate results going to be looked for? It is important when I meet the teacher group that I stress the pivotal role they will play. The project has begun top down (could it be any other way in DET schools?) but needs to move into democratic practices as fast as possible. My worry is — did I make the teachers' role clear enough?

Field note, 12 March 1987

When I met the group of five teachers (Alice, Hilda, Gloria, Miriam and Linda) I stressed the importance of teachers' insights — they are the experienced classroom teachers not me, so I thought I would bring in a selection of materials and ideas from which they could choose what they liked for their classes. This was readily agreed to... All in all the meeting went quite well and I think I am managing to avoid a top-down approach.

Field note, 2 April 1987

Teachers want to prepare an 'oral' lesson so I took materials to the school at lunchtime as we had agreed. In an empty classroom I set everything out on the tables — a mix of books, charts, 'big books', a box of finger puppets, and sets of photographs. After the teachers arrived I withdrew to one side and did not say anything while they spent about 20 minutes sifting through the material, discussing amongst themselves in Xhosa. Alice and Hilda chose 'So Long Songololo' for a lesson in which they said they would read the story to the children and ask them questions. I suggested

they might want to have the children try to answer questions in their groups first and then report to everybody else in English which Alice thought was a good idea because more children would be involved. After quite a long time I asked if anybody else had decided what they wanted. Doris took the copies of photographs from 'The Cordoned Heart' and said the pupils could look at the pictures and tell their own stories. Finally, Miriam and Gloria said they thought that they would develop a lesson around the finger puppets.

By 23 April all the teachers were to have tried out a lesson which they would then discuss with me. In fact they explained that the presence of student teachers had made this impossible and all the lessons were postponed to May.

Field note, 23 April 1987

I asked Gloria and Miriam what they would be doing and when I should come back. There was a longish pause, and Miriam blurted out would I come and do the lesson. She said they always break into Xhosa as soon as the children do not understand so there is no pressure on the pupils to use or understand English. She said that the UCT student teachers at the school had 'run away' from the Std 3s because they did not understand much English and had asked to have their 'crit' lessons with std 5s. I agreed but they are both to watch the lesson and comment afterwards. I also asked them to check with the pupils that it would be alright for me to teach them. Miriam said the pupils would be pleased — that they even go home and talk about the white teachers at their school! We spoke about what I might do in the lesson, with most of the ideas coming from me! I suggested using the finger puppets

but they were not at all keen. They in turn suggested that I use a comprehension passage from the set English textbook, or do something 'out of the syllabus'. With some persuasion they agreed that 'any passage would do'.

I taught this lesson, it was videotaped and viewed by the teacher group but comments by the teachers on the lesson were limited in the discussion which followed. Moreover, I had chosen to overlook teachers' deep concern to do things 'which are in the syllabus'.

Field note, 3 June 1987

When I met with the group today, the teachers were not very forthcoming. The meeting did not go well! Mavis, for example, said she was 'just not feeling herself today'. Teachers spoke reluctantly about the lessons they had given, they were unenthusiastic about resources and my general impression was one of lack of interest. I have a feeling that teacher expectations of the project are not being met even if they are being too polite to make this explicit.

I felt depressed and unsure how best to proceed and asked the project assistant, Tozi Mgobozi, to interview the teacher group a few days later, thinking that they might be more forthcoming with her. She negotiated with the teachers to allow her to tape record the meeting which was conducted in Xhosa and then translated and transcribed.

Extract from transcript, 9 June 1987

Gloria: My main complaint about this project is that it takes up our teaching time. Whilst I am here, I am missing another class because I have to attend to you. Sometimes it's not

English, it's another subject, the pupils are suffering because they are waiting for me ... I thought that this project meant that Melanie would take the classes at times, that would help our pupils because mainly our pupils experience problems in expressing themselves in English. I thought she would take some lessons and get some insights into the problems we experience and then advise. Instead she is probing from us. And we are compelled to use English and Xhosa when we teach English even though we know that this is wrong.

Miriam: We are guided by the syllabus and what we are doing is not in the syllabus. When the other teachers are setting the exam we are at a disadvantage. We had thought Melanie was coming here to help us because we find we cannot avoid translating when we teach in English and the child gets stuck. So if she was teaching, no matter how much the child is struggling, she would make him understand without having to translate.

Alice: That is why in our minds we thought that it would be ideal if Melanie would take classes and we observe and see how it works out and how the children respond, so that we can be aware of how to tackle certain things.

Miriam: We didn't know that we were going to conduct lessons because we do that every day. There is nothing new, we go on as usual without any guidance. So we had thought that Melanie and her group will come here and take lessons and so on, so that we could watch her. So there is really nothing that we gain from her, which is why we

> feel it is a waste of time. We are confused as to what is going on. When Melanie came here we were introduced to her and told she was running a project. When she came the next time, she never uttered a word! But gave us pictures to work on, without consulting us, and she never told us what to do and we were confused. We still are.

The point was teachers wanted me to teach so that they might 'copy some teaching styles'. This I had signally failed to do.

While I certainly felt incredibly despondent at this point, nonetheless, as critical pedagogue I still also assumed to know and judge what teachers' moral choices ought to be:

Field note, 10 June 1987

> *Teachers are still not even recognising that they are as oppressed as the pupils. They are still not even saying that they want to improve their own teaching.*

* ***Rethinking technical skill as merely reproductive teaching***

Yet at this point I also began shift away from the binary opposition of 'skills' and mimetic practice (what teachers wanted), versus social justice and transformation (what I thought was needed), or put another way, technical versus emancipatory knowledge, to a view where I came to understand one as inhering within the other. This held equally for my own practice of facilitation where my commitment to social justice did not absolve me from needing to learn technically how to practise social justice as a facilitator. I expressed it this way in my thesis:

Thesis extract

> *Mezirow (1981)... argues that perspective transformation engages all three 'learning domains', where the technical involves learning for task related competence, the practical learning for interpersonal understanding, and the emancipatory learning for perspective transformation. As he notes, in real situations, all three learning domains are intertwined. Facilitating learning, whether as teachers or teacher-educators involves mastering all three. Thus in my own practice... a rhetorical commitment to transformation was necessary but not sufficient for emancipatory action. I had to learn the technical and practical skills of facilitation. The need for practitioners [teachers] to acquire technical and practical knowledge as well as emancipatory knowledge was further clarified for me by Delpit's (1986) article:*
>
> > *Students need technical skills to open doors, but they need to be able to think critically and creatively to participate in meaningful and potentially liberating work within those doors. Let there be no doubt: a 'skilled' minority person who is also not capable of critical analysis becomes the trainable, low-level functionary of dominant society, simply the grease that keeps the institutions which orchestrate his or her oppression running smoothly. On the other hand a critical thinker who lacks the 'skills' demanded by employers and institutions of higher learning can aspire to financial and social status only within the disenfranchised underworld... we must insist on skills within the context of creative and critical thinking (1986, p. 384).*

Moreover, McWilliam (1992b) warns that our liberatory intentions can manifest as a 'technology of surveillance' if we insist on one totalising educational discourse (a singular emancipatory pedagogy)

which then works against us in that we end up by imposing our own view of 'reality' and appropriate practice, and teacher resistance is interpreted as 'their problem' (as in my field note above). She argues that the resistance lies rather in our own refusal to question such assumptions. Teachers after all respond in terms of the positions available to them in discursive (including pedagogic) practices shaped by particular power-knowledge relations — what it means to be a teacher in a Bantu education primary school, how this constructs teacher subjects, and what is then doable, sayable and thinkable. Authentic participation was unlikely where teachers lacked the social and political power to define the nature and terms of their participation under structural relations of inequality and hence assymetrical project relationships.

It then becomes a case not of merely pandering to teacher voices but acknowledging the partiality and legitimacy of their needs (McWilliam, 1992b). As Delpit's argument also demonstrates, teachers want and need to learn skills to deal with disadvantage — their own as well as the pupils. The deputy principal of Sivuyile explained the problem as follows:

> It is so difficult for us to change the situation but we can improve, we can ask for help, now the other thing, even teaching in classes we know that our education is rotten, that is why the pupils in the location don't want to see us because they say we have taken the rotten education and we want to implement, but we can't do. It is what we are given ... I think if I want to improve, I can't improve by myself, it is for us to get involved with other people because we don't have a university for blacks [africans] here where we can say we will go for help there, the solution is to go to

the whites and ask for help ... I think it is for us to accept that there is nothing we can do alone especially towards education because our education is rotten, it must just be accepted we can't do anything and we are there to ask for help (discussion 15/7/87).

* ***'Exploring the possible rather than reiterating the horrible' (McWilliam, 1992b)***

Still, at Sivuyile, an extended workshop discussion in July 1987 had led to the decision that I should now work with all the Std 3 teachers to obviate the difficulties created when some teachers in a particular standard worked with me, while the others continued with the regular syllabus. Moreover, the teachers felt that pupils would benefit most if I were to move up with the pupils as it were, to work with Std 4 teachers the following year, and then with Std 5 teachers.

I first met with Gloria Hewu, Jennifer Mdoda, Naomi Citabatwa, Miriam Kgomo and Gertrude Ntontela on 22 July 1987. All five teachers had completed Std 8 plus two year Primary Teachers Certificates, with their teaching experience ranging from seven to 29 years. After a lengthy talk by myself on syllabus aims and language across the curriculum, I asked the teachers to decide what they wanted to teach, how many lessons they would teach, who would plan the lessons and so on. They reiterated their demand that I teach:

Gloria: When we teach these things, you will always be in?

Melanie: Not necessarily, I think that you will have to decide. Do you want me to be there, do you want somebody else to be there, if you want me there, why? What do you think?

Gloria: I mean, as we said, for instance, let's take Science. I've done Science the way I'm doing it. So what I would like to be done, if maybe you first take the lesson because with that, from the beginning we've got a problem with our kids because they don't understand really and it's the same problem because we start explaining [in Xhosa] and that's what we want to get rid of. We start explaining in Xhosa if they don't understand, so what I would like you to do, first of all if you take the lesson I can copy you and maybe the following week I will invite you 'Melanie, come to my classroom, I'm going to conduct such and such a lesson.' I don't know if that could be possible.

Melanie: If I understand you, you want me to teach the lesson and then you will go and teach either the same lesson or it could be the next lesson in the sequence, and I could come and watch you teach and then we talk about what I did and what you did and so on?

Gloria: Even if, because we are many, we are five [teachers], even if you will take the lesson in one class, then we all go there, then we watch, you know. Then we will invite you [to watch us].

I accepted the teachers' suggestion that I teach, seeing little alternative in the light of our previous problems. Nonetheless I also wondered if it might also not be feasible to encourage teacher learning by modelling alternative practices, in other words, more than 'copying' would be involved.

I had been encouraged by reading an article at that time on the role of mentors in teachers' learning. Howell (1986) provides a

convincing argument for mentors working with classroom teachers, including demonstration lessons, which she describes as 'a visual argument', in that watching skilled teachers at work can be a powerfully motivating first step in the change process. But, she says, for learning to occur this must be a process in which teachers are actively composing meaning. There was admittedly not much evidence that this had happened when I had taught the oral lesson. Nevertheless, Howell's experience did suggest that demonstration teaching should not be excluded as a possible strategy for change.

I still emphasised that teachers should follow with their own attempts at similar lessons, in other words attempting to position them as agents through reflective imitation and by not taking control away from the teachers:

Field note, 22 August 1987

> *At the end of our meeting today I told the teachers that I felt clearer now about what is expected of me — to demonstrate and to teach, and bring new ideas for the teaching of History, and advice about 'stealing' time from English for cross curricula work. But after my demonstration lessons, I stressed to them that I think teachers will pick up the new ideas very quickly, then it will be time for me to withdraw and say, 'Okay you teach, you go on'.*

Despite the usual hiccups regarding the arrangement of meetings, not least of which was a schools boycott, I thus went on to teach a sequence of six History lessons over three weeks in August. These were taught in Miriam's class and were watched by all five teachers. We met again as a group on 3 September:

Extract from transcript, 3 September 1987

Melanie: Gloria, I remember you saying in one meeting that the way you always teach History is to tell the children the history. You said that you were very curious about how this new way would work, so that's talking about a way of teaching history. Now you might think that's a good way or a bad way. If you think it's a good way you will have a reason for it, if you think it's a bad way you'll have a reason for it. So I think we begin to understand why we do things the way we do by talking about them. Is that clear?

Teachers: Yes.

Gloria: I think here I can say I like this method because really, I used to just talk with the children, I was doing the talking, so maybe I'm really interested to try it this way, more so because I can say it includes the language also, like for instance, the arrangement of paragraphs, the completion of sentences, of words in the sentence. I don't know if this will really work but I really learnt a lot. I'd like to try it because, really, I was doing all the talking.

Melanie: Why do you think that's a problem, you doing all the talking, why would you try it this way as opposed to continuing with the way you have been teaching?

Gloria: Because I want to try and do less talking, the children must work, they must learn to work, they must learn to talk, they must learn to do things themselves.

Melanie: So you think this way they are going to do the talking, the thinking, the work? How do you think this way of teaching is going to affect their English?

Gloria: How is it going to affect them?

Melanie: Do you think that will make their English better or will their English stay the same?

Gloria: I think it will make their English better, for instance, I think this completion of words in these sentences, by completing these sentences the children will understand better, they will learn how to talk English, because our aim is not just to know it, but to talk it, they must talk English I think.

Melanie: Other comments? Miriam? Jennifer?

Jennifer: I'm with Gloria, I also like this method a lot because this method teaches them to be independent, you know, not just to listen to the teacher always. I have noticed that they are always busy and I like that too much!

Melanie: Miriam, what about you, because it was your children that I taught?

Miriam: They [teachers] can also use concrete objects, for instance in the case of the map [activity]. I can go outside with them and take two stones and arrange them on the map, and then tell them to show me using the stones where the different places are on the map.

Melanie: So that's something you would add if you were going to teach it. What about the method of teaching?

Miriam: I thought it was excellent the way you did this.

Melanie: Why do you think it's a good method?

Miriam: Because they seem to be interested and they understood you.

Melanie: Gertrude? Naomi?

Gertrude: Yes, they were interested, they learnt a lot, which means that the lesson was nice and we enjoyed it.

Melanie: How have you all been teaching History up until now?

Teachers: The telling method.

Gertrude: Sometimes you would bring a picture.

Melanie: I remember a comment that Gloria made earlier that the children find the history boring.

Gloria: They should be okay because at least [now] they will be busy themselves instead of listening to me. And the grouping, the grouping is something interesting because the two or three of them in that group they are so anxious to know the correct things, finding information for themselves.

Melanie: Can we talk about that a bit more, the idea that children work well with somebody else, either one other person or a group. In fact in the lessons, I switched from the bigger group to pairs because it seemed to take a lot of time to rearrange the classroom. I wanted everybody to work with somebody else and pairs seemed easier to organise. Can anybody comment on what they think of that, the children working together?

Gertrude: It's a good thing because the other one will help the other and I think the pairs worked better, they were more helpful than in a group of five or six because the others do not get a chance, and the others are stubborn, they like to bully.

Melanie: That's a very interesting comment because I noticed that even in the bigger group they would tend to work with one other person. So the pair work is easy to organise and seems to work quite well. I think what comes out of this for me is that in the end, teachers are the experts, the people who work in the classroom, Yes, I can come in with material and we have a meeting and talk, but in the end *you* are the people who are going to grow. What I'm saying is that what you give to what I'm doing is going to be what makes it fail or succeed in the end, not what I do, but what you actually give, because you're in there with the children (discussion 3/9/87).

I would still argue as I did in the thesis that this conversation was a transforming moment in which teachers take up positions as agents who, even though this is in response to my questions, are nonetheless working together to understand the subject — an alternative approach to teaching History. Certainly, this is a much richer discussion than the earlier truncated one which had followed my teaching of the oral lesson.

This is not to say that this group of teachers now positioned themselves as agents of curriculum development, while there are also oppressive elements in what I have to say, not least in my

telling teachers that they are responsible for the success or failure of what I was trying to do.

Furthermore, one might also argue that these instances of agency are only that, and far from a sustained narrative going beyond isolated moments of criticism. These moments do not yet provide a new account of what it means to be a teacher. Individual teachers working to improve aspects of classroom action and to produce better lessons did not constitute curriculum transformation. Teachers still harped on external factors to justify why they could not change their practice: 'We haven't got material that's our main problem', and 'we don't have the resources — if we had them we would be doing very well'. In this they were highlighting real external constraints but nonetheless not exploring the interstices between the authoritarian discourse and alternatives to it. The something more required to turn the gripes and complaints into a new account of what the teacher community is and means is in the end articulating personal development and reflection with a political discourse and collective political struggle. (Although making authentic connections between the micro and the macro is extraordinarily difficult, the more so unless one understands political action as occurring at a number of different levels.)

As mentioned earlier, four of the five teachers went on to try some of the ideas. Only Miriam, whose class had already been taught the lessons, did not try any of the new methods. From the interviews which followed I have constructed a 'conversation' from the words of teachers, accepting again that these words and responses were shaped by my presence. Thus I do not claim any 'truth' status for my construction. All I do claim is that there is further evidence of teachers working in a highly oppressive system, and who had

always acted out a transmission model of teaching, taking up a different, even though still limited, position as participants in a curriculum development discourse:

Naomi: This method is quite right, the pupils have got something to do, they like doing something you give them, you say read, even with that story, you say read and when they have read the story then they must answer just a few comprehension questions. And then I did what Melanie did with activity number six. They liked it so much they all wanted to finish first. As Melanie showed us, that is what I copied from her. If you let them read, then ask questions, they do try, yes they do try. You see because we're safe, because we're blacks you know, the children are black and so we try and explain it in Xhosa. Melanie let them read now, they try because she doesn't know Xhosa, she let them read the other day, they tried to answer didn't they? Yes, and they do it. I shall no longer explain it now in Xhosa, they will read from now on, they will read and they will start understanding.

Gertrude: I tried that activity where the pupils must fill in those missing words from the list. Well, I can say half the class managed, because I gave them the textbooks and that worksheet that Melanie supplied us with. So I said, I am not going to give you any information, you are just going to find it for yourselves and fill in those words. I think about half the class managed to fill in those words correctly but the others were just fumbling so at the end we did them together on the blackboard so they just understood and copied them into their books. I think this

method is effective, because when you use the telling method then the talking is done by you and they don't concentrate, the others like to play. When you come to the end and ask questions, one or two children are answering, but when they are taking part — just as in those lessons which Melanie gave them — then it worked better.

Jennifer: I think the children must talk all of the time, I mean I think they learn best in that time, in that lesson when they talk a lot. Even today, they were so, I mean the lesson was interesting for them, they were doing things for themselves. Sometimes I asked them what's going on, they told me the whole story. You know I think they like to work in those groups. There are some lazy ones in the class, or they are shy, so when they are working in groups, you can see the shy ones they are busy talking to those ones, then you will notice, mmmmm, now they are doing the job because I'm not there. You know sometimes I make them to be shy, I'm harassing them. So when they work in groups they co-operate very well. I tried one of those worksheets. First I gave them history textbooks, I said to them they must read the lesson about the free burghers and then after that I gave them the worksheet to fill in the missing words. They asked me 'Teacher, what is the meaning of khoikhoi?' We the teachers are saying to them 'hottentots' so we did not change that word to be khoikhoi. So I told them this word stands for hottentot. They filled in the missing words, after that we did it together on the blackboard. It went very well. They were

interested and they were inquisitive to go. You know, firstly I was good in talking to them, they listen to me you know, but now I think I'm going to change myself to do this method you know. I want to try for this year, so next year I will be clearer about this method. Next year I will be perfect in this one. Now I'm still learning to know, I'm not quite perfect in this one.

Gloria: Well, I liked this method because, as I stated long ago, we use it even in Geography just like History. Most of the time we did the talking but now since I saw, I learnt about this method from Melanie, I know I must give them the atlases. I've told them to find some places themselves before telling them. I think if they discover facts themselves it's easy to remember it rather than if I just told them, they forget, but they know now, oh, the Oliphants river, they see it, they know. So I think they will remember it better rather than telling them. And the English will improve because first of all the sentence building, take for instance the filling in of words, they read the whole sentence, so now they know how to form a sentence.

The point to remember here, as Moll and Slonimsky (1989) emphasise, is that teachers who are 'products' of the DET and tertiary rote-learning contexts, conceive of educational activity as being to 'replicate what is given' and tend to be radically confused by a context which even suggests that there might be a range of ground rules. Yet, this does not seem to be the case in this instance at least.

Reflections V: The 'clinical gaze' is the eye of power

This section further reflects on the asymmetrical power relationship between myself and teachers. It has a slightly different focus, however, in that in 1988 and 1989 I entered teachers' classrooms and observed them teach. When I did not do this I watched videotapes of their lessons, or listened to tape recordings. All this contributed to the dilemma explored throughout this chapter as the radical difference between 'being present and being the presence itself' (Freire, 1985, p. 105).

I have found it helpful in reflecting on this process to draw on the concept of the 'clinical gaze' of the facilitator. Even though I was not strictly cast in the traditional role of the supervisor of teachers' practice, nonetheless, how else was I to monitor change without projecting my gaze into classrooms?

Field note, 27 January 1988

> *When I met with Sizabathele teachers today I tried to explain that I did not want to impose myself and my ideas on teachers.*

Yet, argues Maurice, a face-to-face encounter:

> ... is stacked in favour of the face that claims expert knowledge, its own language, and system of symbols, and tools that convey the power of truth ... The clinical gaze is that of the eye of power: facing it the subject becomes an object, quantified into data, categorized and judged ... The gaze is asymmetrical: the subject-as-object is powerless to gaze back and question its majesty and authority: to do so would be called inappropriate, unrealistic and against improvement (1987, p. 246).

Like Gore (1993), whose explication of 'regimes of pedagogy' was sketched earlier and Bernstein's (1971) 'invisible pedagogy', Maurice notes that silent and self-effacing ('democratic', 'recessive') regimes of power are no less intrusive or effective than explicit domination. Maurice points out that the supervisory relationship works to mask power relations. We must therefore question who interprets the data (of the teachers' lessons); whose power and truth are implicit in any analysis made of educational practice; what does improvement mean to teachers and the regime of truth under which they live their professional lives? The question then is how power structures can be made explicit and criticized, while also coming to accept pragmatically what it might be possible to change in our own practice even where we do not have total control over our professional lives.

My initial approach to working with teachers in the project, however, simply obscured the difference between myself as facilitator and teachers. The effect was still to lead the teacher-subordinates to accept their position, to see me as white, as UCT expert, as provider of resources. The point here is that disclaiming any imposition on my part, and proclaiming a different positioning for myself did not make it so in practice where I was interacting with teachers, with their own diverse biographies, and their positioning within authoritarian discursive practices. Nor was I *not* imposing, as the next sentence from the same field note shows:

Field note, 27 January 1988

> *Instead, I explained that if change is going to be real, what the teachers, and the school community and the children want, then the way to do it is for teachers to research their own practice so that teachers take responsibility for their own learning in their own classrooms and investigate what's going on.*

This suggests my own imperfectly understood struggle reflected in my desire to make teachers the objects of my emancipatory wishes. All this was further complicated where teachers seemed to want me to evaluate their lessons:

Field note extracts (March-April 1988)

1 *I am still wrestling with the issue of democratic practice within the project and, related to this, teachers taking responsibility for their own learning. When I watched Zolani teach I probably went on to comment too much. It's difficult for me to find a balance as the critical friend.*

2 *At the end of her lesson Beatrice asked me what I thought of the lesson. But I'm getting better at deflecting these comments and did not reply but countered by asking when she would like to watch the video.*

3 *Cynthia asked me at the end of her lesson what I had thought of it, while Alice asked me to do a demonstration lesson as she wasn't sure 'if she was doing it right'.*

Teachers said little, for I was the expert Other, and I found myself lapsing into an instructional mode as I made detailed suggestions about alternative practice and concrete ways of improving particular

lessons. This is an excerpt from a discussion in March. Ruth Ndude and I had been watching the video of her Std 4 reading lesson:

Melanie: What do you think of the lesson?

Ruth: Oh, I don't know Melanie, what do you think about it?

Melanie: Well you said while it was still running, you said it's a boring lesson, is it different from the way you would normally teach reading or is that the way you always teach reading?

Ruth: Well, that's the way that I usually teach it (discussion 10/3/88).

Here is another example of an early discussion with Walter Mabizela about his Std 4 Xhosa language lesson, also on 10 March:

Melanie: Having watched the lesson on tape, what do you think of it?

Walter: Uh, I don't see anything special, in fact the response of the, unless the children are just dull, ja.

Melanie: Do you think that a way needs to be found to get the children more involved?

Walter: Yes, maybe, ja, but uh, in fact the children have been grouped [streamed] so I thought maybe this is the dull group, I don't know, ja (discussion 10/3/88).

As I was coming to understand, the facilitator had, in effect, to *teach*, given that teachers' experience of bantu education had severely limited their experience of different forms of classroom practice:

Field note, 3 August 1988

> *I think that people need to have a range of alternatives, they can't make decisions when they don't know what else there is to choose from. Teachers start off by not knowing what the alternatives are, they know what they've got doesn't work but they don't know what else there is.*

But what I still lacked self-awareness of at the time (including the analysis presented in my thesis account) was the oppressive element in my own initial insistence on emancipatory pedagogy through action researchas a totalising educational discourse which then worked against me in that I tried to impose my own view of 'reality' (or 'improvement') and appropriate practice (McWilliam, 1992).

However, as I have been exploring in this and the previous chapter, there can be no escape from relations of power — where knowledge is being produced (including emancipatory or critical knowledge), there also and always is power and regimes of truth. However, this also does not preclude considering how power and control over the production of classroom knowledge shifted (or not) over time.

A case for consideration

At the start, teachers positioned me as the primary producer of knowledge about teaching, and as filling the space of 'supervisor/ evaluator'. Still, I did try to work in ways which would shift ownership of knowledge production to the teachers and so shift power relations, allowing teachers' subjugated knowledge to emerge. To this end I want to consider two interactions, 18 months apart, with just one teacher, Veronica Khumalo. This one case is not meant to suggest that all teachers changed in the same

way, at the same pace, and in the same time frame, nor that my interactions with them mirrored those with Veronica. Rather it serves as an exemplar of the possible. There is no claim here to generalise for all the teachers, rather only to signal that this teacher shifted, that I too developed, and that together we constructed a different form of INSET relations, even if still limited by the wider structuring of the curriculum and school organisation. In exploring work with Veronica it is also not my intention to detail the actual curriculum changes except in so far as they illuminate processes of development and shifts in power relations.

Veronica was, at that time, a junior primary teacher in charge of a Std 1 class of 50 pupils to which she taught all subjects. By 1988 when we first met and started to work together on the teaching of reading at Phakamisa, Veronica had been teaching for 14 years. Her teaching career had begun in 1974 in the Transkei, before she moved in 1980 to Phakamisa, then still located in a squatter camp. Her own schooling had been chequered, starting in Langa in Cape Town where she recalled that in primary school 'we were just taught, we were just memorizing everything. The only thing they [teachers] liked was to use the stick!' She attended high school in the Transkei before finally returning to complete Std 9 at Nyanga near Cape Town. High school was little different from her earlier experiences: 'There were no teaching aids in the classroom, and the classrooms were just clean, no pictures on the walls, it was the same thing, we were learning by memorizing.' At the time of the project she still had two matric subjects to complete, and statistically, would have been labelled as one of the large body of 'underqualified' teachers. After leaving high school she had obtained a two-year Primary Teachers Certificate at a training college in Transkei, and by

1988 she had still had no opportunity to be involved in any form of in-service training.

When she joined the project Veronica's reading practice was typical of the dominant form in DET schools. She herself described how she had been instructed at the training college to teach reading:

> When you teach reading you are supposed to drill those [new] words. You choose the difficult words which you think they are not going to be familiar to the pupils, and then you drill them, you use them in sentences, and then you read the passage aloud for pattern reading to the pupils, and then the pupils read after you, the teacher (interview 24/8/89).

Early in 1988 I organised a workshop for Veronica and a small group of five other junior primary teachers at her school. The workshop presenter, Wendy Flanagan, offered a different way of teaching reading which emphasised reading as a process of making meaning (see Flanagan, 1993). I observed Veronica's lesson which followed, and we also made a videotape to watch together afterwards.

I wish to highlight certain aspects of importance to me in revisiting this data. I raise all the questions, and Veronica mostly responds by echoing the ideas presented at the workshop, with little evidence of her ownership of the method or the process of producing new knowledge about teaching. My interrogative mode is more oppressive than empowering as I 'test' what she has learnt from the methods workshop. Not surprisingly, at one point Veronica laughs, perhaps uneasily, at these questions (checking pronunciation had not been encouraged at the workshop), but because I am more

powerful she is positioned by both of us as the subject-as-object of my gaze.

Part of our discussion on 2 May 1988, after watching the videotape together, now follows:

Melanie: What was your reason for starting off by retelling the story in your own words for the children before they actually read from the book?

Veronica: Yes, because I wanted them to, I wanted to help them to understand what they read.

Melanie: So you felt that if they heard that first orally it will help with the reading?

Veronica: Yes.

Melanie: Okay, right okay. And then why did you decide to pin the whole story on the board instead of say putting up one picture at a time?

Veronica: It's because I wanted them to read continuously, I didn't want them to stop and sometimes keep quiet and doing nothing.

Melanie: Okay, well you've put things up ...

Veronica: Ja, up ...

Melanie: Okay, in fact you know in some of the other lessons where they've done it the other way [putting up the story piece by piece] it breaks the ...

Veronica: It breaks the continuity

[...]

Melanie: Why did you want them to read aloud?

Veronica: To read aloud?

Melanie: mmmm

Veronica: [laughing]

Melanie: There's no right or wrong answer, its just why, why you think its a good idea.

Veronica: I wanted them to read aloud so that I can hear the pronunciation of the words.

Melanie: Okay, and then you moved your pointer quickly across the text. Why was that?

Veronica: I didn't want them to read word for word...

And so on, for some thirty minutes.

In the course of the next 18 months she had myself and another teacher (brought in to PREP as a consultant because I am not a junior primary specialist) to work alongside her in her classroom; we videotaped further lessons of hers and her colleagues in 1988 and 1989; and snatched time to watch these as a group. In all of this Veronica and her colleagues were using new materials — stories, poems and so on, as well as using the prescribed reader more creatively. In 1989 she continued to try new ideas and briefly kept a journal. The teacher group also presented two workshops — one to colleagues at the school in 1988, and one in 1989 to teachers from a few neighbouring schools.

Our final interview took place in October 1989 in the school staffroom. In presenting lengthy extracts from this interview I try to demonstrate the connections between interview statements rather

than chopping up the account under thematic categories. Moreover, I do not wish to treat Veronica's interview statements as either an 'accurate' or 'distorted' account of reality. Its importance lies in how she accounts for her own development. To argue otherwise is to decontextualise the interview, the nature of which was such as to shape communication in particular ways. Of course this was not a conversation amongst co-equals, but nor should this then be taken to indicate that Veronica 'conceals' things from me, either telling me what she believes I want to hear, or constructing her account in ways which cast her in a favourable light. This would be to assume again the mantle of 'master of truth and justice' (Foucault, quoted in Smart, 1985) and to indicate some moral shortcoming on her part:

Melanie: Were you satisfied with that method [of teaching reading]?

Veronica: I was not satisfied.

Melanie: What was wrong with it?

Veronica: I've discovered that instead of concentrating on reading, you just taught the meaning of words. The pupils did not become fluent in reading. That method was not good at all.

Melanie: So they were recognising isolated words.

Veronica: And at the same time you waste a lot of time doing that drilling of words. When the time ends for you to change the period, you have done little reading.

Melanie: Now, how have you changed? What sorts of ways do you teach reading now?

Veronica: Now? Ever since I became involved in this project, I've learnt a lot of things, especially in reading. I was not satisfied before. So here I collected a lot of ideas from other teachers. So I tried these methods but I could see the children are really improving and they are now interested in reading. Now I've discovered that you can get a lot from the pupils. It's not always you should tell the pupils what is what. Because this method I'm using, first of all I do less work [in the lesson], the most of the talking is done by the pupils. That means they also get a chance to give their ideas, that is, the pupils ... Now I take, let's say, just a short story, I take the main ideas from the story and then I first narrate the story to the pupils, before they do it. And then, instead of writing difficult words, I just show the words by action. I act, instead of explaining the words ... Then the pupils understand ... I hand out the main ideas [written] on the chalkboard. The pupils read. They read the main ideas. I take the book itself because they must touch the book. So they take the book themselves and they read. They read as groups now. As I have divided them into groups according to their ability. They read as a group and in each group there is a leader because you cannot cope to run around the class. You see, from the beginning you have told the leader what to do, in reading. And then you can concentrate a little bit, you do go round the groups but you concentrate a little bit to those poor readers. You see? And then after that you give the groups the activities from the reading you were doing. You know your groups. You know which group is

fast. For the first group you give a tougher activity, as they go, till the last group. And then you exchange the activities. Then in that way, the pupils in my classroom, I can assure you, they are very interested in reading.
[...]

It [this way of teaching reading] works because, even if you are not in the classroom, the pupils go the library box and take out a book and read the book, and when you ask them narrate for me any story you have read, they just narrate the story. That means they read now with understanding. They don't need me ... They are so curious. This way of reading really made them curious.

Melanie: How often do you work from the prescribed reader and how often do you find you can use books like *Mrs Wishy-Washy*?

Veronica: The prescribed book? It's not necessary to use it a lot. Because as I see it the child becomes stereotyped. But if you take — there must be a variety. I don't think it is necessary to stick [only] to the prescribed book. Sometimes you see the book, it doesn't teach anything to the child, the stories aren't meaningful. They are just there to be read.
[...]

Melanie: Would you be confident to share what you've learnt with other teachers?

Veronica: Yes, of course! And what I've discovered, Melanie, we had a course with Miss Nama [DET inspector] on the 4th

[October]. What I've discovered, they were preaching there the group, the group teaching. And they explained this group teaching and it is said it has been introduced in the training schools [colleges]. And I said:'Ah! We were doing this group teaching in Phakamisa with Melanie'. I said so to my principal. We even contributed there about this group teaching. You know what they said? They said you must group all the pupils and then you give different activities, different subjects. And I said: 'No! — it won't work out. If you are doing English, you can't give another group a Maths activity. No! It won't work. That is confusion for the pupils'.

Melanie: And what was the response when you said that?

Veronica: They congratulated me! And the inspectress herself said: 'No let this be done like they are doing it at Phakamisa'.

Melanie: And why do you think group work works well?

Veronica: It works so well because they get to talk to each other because another child can get something from the other child. So that teaches them to communicate with other pupils outside. We are preparing them to be adults. So they must be free outside and that gives them chance even to.

[...]

Melanie: Are there any final comments you want to make about the project. Or anything you want to ask me?

Veronica: Eh this project! I don't see anything that you didn't ask about it because the only thing I can say, I really thank

this project. At first I couldn't understand what you were trying to do because when you called us you asked ideas from us. And I said no! I thought you were going to give us ideas. But in the long run I could see that this project introduced something new to me because now I can go to the other teacher and ask them: 'How can I tackle this?' That is what I've learnt from this project. I can go to other schools and ask: 'How do you make this?' And even now I can talk in front of other teachers and say something, what I do in my classroom. All those things I got from this project. I was just a self-centred somebody. I just go to my classroom, I teach, I go out, I go home. Now I discovered that, no! You must go to other people, to other teachers. And you must also give help to other teachers.

Melanie: Have you found it useful to talk and think about your teaching? To reflect on it? Has that helped you learn about teaching?

Veronica: Yes, yes. Because I don't know everything. The other teachers' know what I don't know. So the only way I can get that information is to talk to that teacher.

Melanie: What about learning by doing because this project has always emphasised 'now you must go and try it'. Has that helped? Trying things out in the classroom?

Veronica: Yes, I used to try things in my classroom but if I see it doesn't work I try to do it in other ways. And then I go back to that teacher who has told me do this and this, and tell her 'I did what you said but it didn't work, but I tried

this again'. And then we talk and talk and she also goes and tried mine and also comes back again, and so on and so on.

My interpretation is that Veronica is in control of her teaching process, and of the interview. Even though I still ask the questions — it is still an interview rather than a conversation — she does nearly all the talking, raising issues and questions that go beyond my own inquiries. Here, I believe we see her positioned as a producer of curriculum knowledge in her classroom, with colleagues, even with a school inspector. The power relations have shifted into ones more collegial than supervisory, although still asymmetrical given our different professional locations:

Reflections VI: Shaping alliances across difference

As part of my ongoing reflexivity about my own research and educational practices, I am drawn to Ellsworth who writes:

> Right now, the classroom practice that seems most capable of accomplishing this is one that facilitates a kind of communication across differences that is best represented by this statement: If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world and the 'Right thing to do' will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive (1989, p. 324).

All this means problematising the taken for granted assumptions of critical pedagogy and the unequal relations of power it conceals in

order to understand the oppressive aspects of emancipatory and critical educational practices. But what is also at stake here is not becoming trapped in a 'paralysing pessimism' (Gore, 1991). Revisiting and reviewing these experiences, like Ellsworth and Gore, I too have had to adopt a greater tentativeness and humility about accomplishments in this work with teachers, while not losing sight of the possible.

To this end I wish to draw on extracts from interviews with three more teachers and the principal of Phakamisa school. They are presented not as concluding statements — reflexivity after all is not about closure — but to express a fundamental optimism in our capacity to learn and to approach greater self-understanding through our acts of radical self-doubt. As such these extracts capture, through the words of Others, my own development, however uneven, in learning to listen, reflect, reassure, and to balance questioning in work with teachers.

The first two extracts are taken from interviews conducted on my behalf by Lufuno Nevathalu, the third and that of the principal of Phakamisa from interviews I conducted myself:

Extracts from interviews

- She's a person who is within reach you know and if you talk to her she will listen to you, you simply share ideas, she is not the person who always puts words into your mouth or puts ideas into you. No, she comes over with ideas and lets you decide on the ideas and change them the way you see them and at the same time discuss how to change those ideas so as to suit you (Gladstone Mashiyi, interview, 28/9/88).

- If I have problems we sit down together and discuss it, and then we plan the lesson together. She gives her views and I give my views and thereafter I prepare the lesson and teach it in class and then after the lesson we will sit again together, maybe at times with some other teachers, and comment on the lesson. And then if it was televised I could see my mistakes and maybe in the following lesson now improve and if it was tape recorded I could hear how the kids struggle at times and then we sit down with Melanie and discuss these problems (Ruth Ndude, interview, 30/9/88).

- I thought maybe you weren't helping [in the beginning] but now, like Thandie said, she said Alan Kenyon showed them that is the kids that have to do the work. What you wanted was we had to do the work and you were only here to help, not to show us how to do it, but researching our own teaching (Cynthia Bengu, interview, 12/10/1989).

The final extract captures in some small measure my growing understanding of the need to communicate across differences of race in building fluid rather than inflexible, and above all respectful cross-cultural relationships:

> The way of handling teachers also impressed me. There are some people who, I think you have outgrown now, you are not using your skin to communicate with teachers, some people use their skin, just because a person is white and he's using that whiteness, you are not using that whiteness because teachers could communicate with you. And I know that bantu education is so evil that some teachers are unable to structure English sentences correctly. But what I've

> noticed as you were talking to some of my teachers, you were never worried about 'is' and 'ed', past tense and all that jazz, you were picking up what the teacher is trying to say and your way of communicating with them. And also when you come to school, I have never been bothered to worry because I know you are not going to be a nuisance in the school. You have never done anything without consulting me as the principal of the school, you have never at any stage undermined my authority as, you know, other white people. I've seen quite a lot coming into the school who just go straight, they don't see the need of getting to the principal because after all, he's black. Even those who are working for the DET, for instance, the guys who are working for the electricity or building, you just see a man measuring the yard, without consulting the principal. Just because he has a white skin he thinks that he can just get into this school and start measuring but they don't do that where the principal is white. That alone means to me, those petty things you've outgrown, and so I don't have negative criticisms because I know you, I know what type of person you are (Mr Magona, interview, 12/10/89).

Unless we cross boundaries we will be paralysed by the pernicious legacy of racist attitudes and actions in South Africa, or be seduced into the belief that only like can research like, so abandoning the political struggle over the concept of race, as I noted in the introduction. Moreover, Edward Said reminds us that despite differences, identities, people and cultures have always overlapped and influenced one another through 'crossing, incorporation, recollection, forgetfulness and of course conflict' (1993, p. 401).

Still, a cautionary word is needed. It also does not mean allowing race to slip off the agenda in a 'non-racial' discourse in post apartheid South Africa for apartheid and racism are not the same thing. Racism is a set of values steeped in the history of colonialism and slavery which oppress black people in whatever system they happen to live. What is at stake here is for white democrats to confront, however painfully, that the dreadfully warped nature of apartheid society did not pass us by. We must needs face our own raced identity not merely with a rhetorical move or two, declaring oneself say, on the side of the oppressed, while ignoring the socially constructed basis of such inequalities. What is demanded is to work in practice to establish friendship and respect across differences.

Reflections VII: Reform or Transformation?

As signalled in Chapter Two, I confronted quite sharply in my work the dilemma as to whether what I was doing was simply oiling the creaky wheels of Bantu education, or in some measure through microlevel shifts making a qualitative contribution to educational change. In short, was my work with teachers only superficial reform of the existing curriculum, as Unterhalter and Wolpe (1989) might argue, or a more fundamental transformation of the form and content of teachers' practice as I had hoped? The principal of Sizithabathele captured the difficulty for me:

> So I'll say one can try to be pragmatic about improving the situation. You could be successful to a certain extent but success again has got its problems. These are problems within the system because the authorities could misconstrue your success as to the effectiveness, or the genuine nature of bantu education. They could say the fault is with the

> teachers, it is not with the system itself because if it could be seen to be working very well in some schools then you could be made a model of success for bantu education (Mr Lungiswe, interview, 29/5/88).

This dilemma must also be contextualised historically, however, at a time when the dominant discourse in progressive politics was on radically overturning the prevailing relationship between education and society through mass organised struggle. Anything less than this, including addressing teachers' practical problems as they understood and experienced them in their everyday working lives, was often dismissed as 'liberal' and 'reformist', both understood perjoratively as limited in any contribution to transformative change through not being connected or driven by mass organisations. So transformation was understood to mean a fundamental restructuring of society, nothing less than liberation from class exploitation and racial oppression.

Given this context, if my attempts only scratched the surface of change which I might ideally like to see, was it nonetheless better to do something rather than nothing? My understanding of this dilemma became more nuanced over time:

Thesis extract

> *What I now understand as reform only, and what I came to see as reform as a possible entry to more radical change, has been part of a learning process not only during my work with teachers, but also in writing up this study. Hence there have been shifts in my own position: firstly, from the naive belief that my work in schools would inevitably contribute to transformative change; to a position by April 1989, after criticism at the RESA [Research on*

Education in South Africa] conference in Grantham, where I saw my work as reform only ('gilding gutter education'); to the more nuanced understanding which I now hold of the dialectical connections of work such as this and wider change.

Now I would argue more confidently that projects such as PREP contributed to reshaping a culture of teaching in which teachers began to discover and rediscover their responsibilities for teaching and learning in their own classrooms and schools, to explore for the first time a creative role for themselves in curriculum development. Of course this was 'reform', but under existing conditions we could not progress any further towards the bigger transformation picture. At the very least, however, we also began to imagine an alternative to Bantu education and to act as if it could be otherwise.

Interwoven in this account is the further recurring issue mentioned earlier of the blurring of technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge, where technical and practical knowledge acquired through a project such as PREP arguably must underpin emancipatory understanding, as Delpit (1986) forcefully argues. The point was how to enable access to such knowledge and theorising about practice in such ways which went beyond the reproductive and limited strategy of merely providing 'recipes' for teachers to 'copy':

Field note, 29 April 1988

I wonder how useful new methods are if the teachers aren't clear about what is wrong with their present methods and why the new method is better. It seems like grafting new and misunderstood ideas onto existing bad practice. How does one address this I wonder?

At first I expressed this in a rather totalising way, 'good' versus 'bad' practice. Moreover, changing more than the surface features of one's teaching is demanding work and often we remained disappointingly stuck at this level. Yet I also learnt over time the importance of a process which nonetheless took the working lives of teachers and their pedagogical understandings as starting points for the construction of new knowledge within a framework which was as participatory as the existing conditions of possibility allowed. This is illustrated in this chapter and in the one which follows.

A last word

In writing this chapter I have attempted to trace the exercise of my authority as a teacher educator in relations of power in ways which are, as Gore explains, 'sometimes emancipatory, sometimes repressive, sometimes both, sometimes neither' (1993, p. 125). In all this, my purpose has been a re-assembling which pays attention to the regimes of truth within which I operated and which I perpetuated in order that I might point the way to acting differently, and with honesty.

Chapter Five

'Spaces of freedom'

> The point of identifying spaces of freedom is not to escape all regimes and technologies, only current ones; to increase awareness of current regimes and technologies; to recognize that current regimes need not be as they are; to continually identify and squeeze into those spaces of freedom (Gore, 1993, p. 156).

This chapter foregrounds a closer examination of the curriculum[1], exploring teachers' professional development through curriculum development and the complexity of choice and constraint facing both myself and the teachers. What 'spaces for freedom' (Gore, 1993) existed for teachers to engage critically with their work in order to change their practice? My work with Lumka Molotsi, a Std 3 History teacher at Phakamisa, and Beatrice Dlamini, a Std 5 English teacher at Sizithabathele, however, also tracks the constraints presented by the regulative discourse of apartheid schooling and a particular view of what counted as knowledge in school History and reading lessons.

I have constructed only two case studies, given that professionals (teachers and more especially teacher educators) can, as Rudduck explains, 'learn directly from accounts of practice in settings which are similar enough to their own to ensure engagement but different enough to offer new angles and new possibilities for action' (1994, p. 7). My hope is that teacher educators committed to constructing

new forms of INSET will be able to identify with the successes, the reverses, the promise and the limits recounted here.

Curriculum as a social construction

Now curriculum is not a natural object but socially constructed (and hence can be changed) through contestation, conflict and compromise rather than consensus (Cherryholmes, 1987). The 'truth' of a curriculum is historically situated, and dominant discourses and power relations determine what counts as true (Cherryholmes, 1987). Thus arguments about the curriculum are also arguments over the social order:

> How a society selects, classifies, distributes and transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control (Bernstein, 1971, p. 47).

This view is supported in the recent NEPI report on curriculum:

> There are important social and political dimensions to the curriculum. It is drawn up by particular groups of people and because it reflects particular points of view and values, it is anchored in the experiences of particular social groups; and it produces particular patterns of success and failure (NEPI, 1992, p. 102).

And equally acknowledged by conservative forces — the former white 'own affairs' education authorities, and even by Verwoerd in his notorious statement: 'Why teach a Bantu child mathematics?'. Thus the Department of Education and Culture (House of Assembly) stated that:

> The role played by the curriculum in a system of educational provision cannot be overemphasized. It is the curriculum which determines what subject matter should be taught and whom it should be taught to. Furthermore, it determines what the qualifications and skills of the staff should be, what subjects and course choices should be created, what facilities should be made available and what demands should be met by the school time-table. Viewed broadly, it is the curriculum which defines the structure and organisation of a school and of the education system as a whole (quoted in Taylor and Methula, 1993, p. 303).

That is, schools as a site for the material production of knowledge are constitutive of social practice through the social relations of knowledge production (Bernstein, 1990; Moore, 1988).

How does the curriculum encode the underlying power structures of society? For example, in the primary school History curriculum, what and whose historical knowledge counts as legitimate? Whose knowledge is excluded? What is devalued, as well as valued? Whose interests are represented by the curriculum?

Regulation and constraint

It also needs repeating in considering these two cases that the authoritarian discourse that dominated DET schools, shaped by the undemocratic and racist nature of South African society, as outlined in Chapter Three, plainly constrained much of what could be said and done by teachers and pupils in classrooms and schools.

In my curriculum work with teachers we struggled with the individualised and privatised world of the classroom, and a form of

school organisation which made it virtually impossible to bring teachers together during the school day or enable them to observe each other teach. An ideology of control — of teachers and pupils — shaped the kind of teaching that was possible, for example, the teaching of a kind of history where the content is closed and positive, factual and correct, and where processes, say of questioning, are punitive in intent rather than directed at learning.

The subject-centred curriculum, moreover, holds the hierarchy of knowledge and power in place. The point here is the form of curricular organization of knowledge that influences the school organisation. This point has been most systematically developed by Bernstein (1971) in his paper 'On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge'. His argument is worth rehearsing. Bernstein develops the concept of 'classification' to describe boundaries between fields of knowledge; and 'framing' to describe the regulatory codes for the framing of interaction. A 'collection' type curriculum has strong boundaries between subjects or fields of knowledge; permitted combinations are tightly restricted with little cross-subject collaboration; and the educational relationship is hierarchical, with the taught occupying a position of low status. The collection code implies didactic teaching to inculcate the facts; the emphasis is on states of knowledge rather than ways of knowing. Given the hierarchical organisation of knowledge and the lengthy 'apprenticeship' required to finally understand the 'mystery of the subject', only a select few will finally experience 'in their bones' that knowledge is chaos rather than order, incoherence rather than coherence. But for the many, knowledge is understood to be impermeable, and socialisation into knowledge is socialisation into order. The collection code thus places pressure on the school to

maintain its own order through a hierarchical relationship with knowledge as private property and the generation of an ideology whose function is social control. 'Acceptance rather than speculation is the product' (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 49).

By contrast, in an 'integrated' type curriculum, the contents stand in an open relation to each other, team teaching is encouraged, relationships are horizontal, and subject boundaries more permeable. Teaching and learning are based on the self-regulation of individuals or groups of students, for what counts as having knowledge shapes how the knowledge is to be acquired.

'Framing' refers to the degree of control teachers and pupils possess over the selection, organisation and pacing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship. Strong frames reduce the power of pupils in the pedagogical relationship, while strong classification reduces the power of the teacher in relation to boundary maintenance (what is taught).

Following Bernstein, the curriculum in DET primary schools was strongly classified and strongly framed, placing real constraints on the possibilities of alternative curriculum forms. Moving from a collection to an integrated code demands quite radical shifts, as he explains:

> Thus, a move from a collection to integrated codes may well bring about a disturbance in the structure and distribution of power, in property relations and in existing educational identities. This change of educational code involves a fundamental change in the nature and strength of boundaries. It involves a change in what counts as having knowledge, in what counts as valid transmission of

> knowledge, and a change in the organizational context ... This change of code involves fundamental changes in the classification and framing of knowledge and so changes in the structure and distribution of power and in principles of control. It is no wonder that deep-felt resistances are called out by the issue of change in educational codes (1971, p. 63).

The point is, according to Bernstein's argument, that the curriculum constructs teacher and learner subjects in particular ways by defining what counts as valid knowledge, what counts as the valid way of transmitting that knowledge, and what counts as a valid realisation of knowledge on the part of pupils. That is, the teacher does not simply mediate the curriculum but is also constructed by it (see also Dowling, 1992). The range of options available to teachers and pupils in terms of what may be said, how and by whom is then limited, not least also by the backwash effect of matric assessment which stifles creativity and innovation in school subjects like History (Sieborger *et al.*, 1993).

In the DET senior primary schools where I worked the curriculum was strictly subject based with no integrated work at all taking place. Teachers were assigned subjects to teach and very little if any communication took place between teachers of different subjects in any one standard. This was further reinforced by the pedagogic discourse and the embeddedness of regulative and instructional discourses (Bernstein, 1990). The timetable was divided into 30-minute subject periods, allocating strict spaces to work and to play, and generating intense irritation on the part of teachers if the previous lesson ran over time. Pupils were divided more or less by age (although it needs noting that in the lower standards there

could be an age range as wide as six to 18 years) into standard hierachies, and pupils had to pass the year exam before being allowed to proceed to the next standard. Schoolwork took place in classrooms; assemblies, play and sport in the areas outside. There were spaces for teachers only (like the staffroom) which pupils seldom entered and then only by permission of a teacher. Most teachers had a 'home' classroom, with pupils moving between lessons to these rooms. In every case wooden desks were arranged in long straight rows with the teacher's desk placed at the centre front of the room. Large class sizes further shaped what was possible in these overcrowded rooms. Corporal punishment was common in both schools, although as far as I could tell, not resorted to by either of the teachers in my case studies.

All this, following Bernstein, further highlights the limits of local change, however promising, where small isolated changes (lessons rather than curriculum) did nothing to shift the overall structure of curriculum or to systematically challenge its selection and distribution of knowledge. Whatever recontextualisation of the official curriculum occurred at different sites, shaped by myself and the teachers, these local sites were ultimately embedded in the same hegemonic discourse — apartheid education and a view of history for example, as particular texts written about the past, which set limits to the divergence of the instructional discourse. The overall effect and critical point was (and is) that opportunities to achieve were simply not equally available to all children where the social domain was structured through differences of class, race and gender.

Where, then, were the 'spaces of freedom' (Gore, 1993) and exploration of the 'possible rather than the horrible' (McWilliam, 1992b)?

• *Lumka Molotsi*

Lumka Molotsi had been teaching for two years by the time we started work on the history curriculum in 1989. As a child, she had attended a primary school in Guguletu, recalling one good teacher, a History teacher who 'at least did not talk all the time'. She matriculated from a school in the Ciskei in 1982 and then went on to Lennox Sebe Training College the following year. Here she had completed a three-year Secondary Teacher's Diploma, and after one year of teaching in the Ciskei returned to Cape Town to start work at Phakamisa in 1987. While vague about the methods taught at the college, she did recall having been taught the 'question and answer method', but on the whole she thought her college education too theoretical: 'we were not doing so much in teaching at our college, we had a demonstration there and there, but it was difficult when I came to real teaching at school'. She had had no previous in-service opportunities but had enrolled for a B.A. degree at the University of the Western Cape which she planned to complete in 1990, majoring in Xhosa.

When she and I began working together on the history curriculum in 1989, she had never taught History, nor studied it beyond Std 7 at school. Indeed, she hadn't even liked it at school but 'I had to take it because there was nobody for Biology'. Now she found herself thrust by the school into teaching Std 3 History.

• *'We are chasing ourselves off to finish the syllabus!'*

The Std 3 syllabus in use in DET schools in 1989 set aside two 30-minute periods a week for History, and required pupils to write a

30-minute examination for 50 marks (teachers were instructed on how to allocate the marks to sections of the syllabus), with 20 marks needed to pass.

The long list of 14 syllabus aims bore no relation to the construction of the syllabus or the curriculum form of the textbooks approved for use in DET schools. For example, two of the syllabus aims were 'to arouse in pupils an interest in and a love of the subject, and to awaken in him [sic] a desire to know more about his own and other people'; and, 'the human aspect and drama in historical events rather than the accumulating of facts should be stressed'. A section titled 'Introduction' stated that 'it is important that the pupils should have an elementary knowledge of the methods used by the historian when doing historical research'. The overloaded syllabus, however, allowed no such exploration, and the teachers typically found themselves delivering a monologue at breakneck speed to passive pupils:

> There's a lot of work to be done in the textbook and then they [pupils] are expected to cram or recite it so they are not learning to understand, they are just learning for exam purposes. We are chasing ourselves off to finish the syllabus! (Nombulelo Singiswa, interview, 28/9/88).

Std 3 pupils were expected to study South African history from 1652-1840, with the syllabus specifying how many periods out of a total of 60 for the year were to be spent on each section. Sections covered the 'bushman and hottentot peoples', the 'black peoples' (migrations, Mfecane, life style) for a total of 15 periods; 'white' settlement at the Cape, trekboers, British settlers, and the voortrekkers over 15 periods. This was followed by General

History: ancient Greece and Rome and life in the middle ages in Europe (16 periods) and Africa (7 periods).

What is clear is that even setting aside the scope to be covered, the South African history presented reflected the view that whites (and white men in particular) were the makers of history, a paradigm that corresponded closely to the interpretation of history propagated by the then Afrikaner nationalist power elite:

> If you can look at the history textbooks, they are so biased you know, I mean we are not very happy about it and you don't see our heroes in the books, but you come to learn things about the whites and nothing referring to the Xhosa people at all (Timothy Sibali, interview, 30/9/88).

For example, one Std 3 History textbook *To the Point* by Oosthuizen *et al.* approved for use in DET schools, presents the indigenous people as background information to white settlement and capitalist development, and as 'problems' to be dealt with by the Dutch settlers:

> The first Free Burghers had many difficulties. There were droughts and floods. They had few labourers to help them and the Hottentots stole their produce (1981, p. 55).

The same textbook later explains land dispossession in the interior of South Africa by the voortrekkers:

> The voortrekkers therefore took the land on which no-one lived or else made treaties with black chiefs who were willing to give them some land. The voortrekkers looked on these treaties as legal (1981, p. 88).

These textbooks present history as a fixed body of unproblematic factual knowledge with no mention of original sources or competing historical explanations around events like the 'Mfecane'. Teachers meanwhile felt constrained by the authoritarian structures of control and surveillance from acting independently:

> But the problem that we are faced with *now* is how to teach them this [the textbook], that's the very first thing we are having to do before going to that [alternative] (Gladstone Mashiyi, workshop discussion, 13/10/88).

Teachers are, moreover, further restricted by their own lack of subject knowledge which limited them in teaching children how to manipulate historical ideas.

To add to all this, the language used in the textbooks is simplistic, making it even more difficult to grasp the topic being studied. For example, to say that 'the hottentots had always been cattle owners and were no good at working on the lands' or that 'The hottentots bartered their cattle and when game was scarce they stole cattle from the [white] cattle owners' neither helps to explain the relationships and tensions between coloniser and colonised, nor to understand the concepts of dispossession and resistance. These books are dry, dull, conceptually impoverished and boring, while the illustrations are poor.

Ideally of course a textbook should not be the only determinant of history teaching. Nevertheless the reality in these DET schools and a wider print starved environment[2] was that it was the only source of information not only for pupils, but also for the teacher.

Changing the content of history lessons

Changes to the content of lessons took place within definite parameters prescribed by the syllabus, and bounded by Lumka's own limited historical understanding and subject knowledge, all broadly to be understood as the regulative discourse of apartheid education, and history education in particular.

I lent Lumka books which made revisionist accounts of South African history accessible without being simplistic, together with copies of a rather better textbook series available in (white) Natal schools. This was intended to help her begin to read history critically, develop confidence in her own subject knowledge, and underpin our work together on the curriculum content. For example, when Lumka and I planned her first history lesson in February 1989, I gave her a copy of a booklet on *The Khoisan* which I had prepared for PREP in 1987, saying:

> You might find it useful to read a little bit around the content you're teaching. What these information sheets do is tell you more about the san and the khoikhoi and they also show how these groups of people were affected by the arrival of the white colonists. Some of the stuff you won't find in the History textbook and then you have to decide whether or not you want to pass that on to the children (planning 8/2/89).

Later in the same conversation I suggested:

> I think a teacher needs to recognise that there are different points of view in history. So this writer will have one point of view, this writer will have another. One of the things you

> need to think about as a teacher is how accurate the interpretation is of what happened in the past, and it's particularly important in school history because it's written from the point of view of Afrikaner nationalists (planning 8/2/89).

Retrospectively, however, what this extract reveals is the possible extent to which I underestimated, or took for granted, my own historical knowledge[3]. Thus I was able to locate 'a point of view' within a paradigm. But it now seems doubtful to me that Lumka, who had not studied history beyond Std 7 at school, or at college, and had not even chosen to teach History at the school, would have understood the meaning of 'the Afrikaner nationalist paradigm'. The point here is that presenting these ideas to Lumka did not mean she would understand me in the way I hoped or expected. Rather, she would make sense of these ideas in terms of her own knowledge.

Lumka went on to read and use one of the information sheets from *The Khoisan* booklet, explaining to her pupils that the use of the term 'hottentots' was insulting:

> This name hottentots was not their name, they were the name given them by the Europeans when they were insulting them. Today the name hottentot is no longer used by the good historian, so you will use the people's name for themselves, the khoikhoi (lesson 18/2/89).

While in a later lesson on the arrival of the Dutch colonists, and contrary to the textbook's emphasis, she reminded her pupils that the Dutch were the newcomers to the country, not the khoikhoi (11/7/89). When she taught her class about the arrival of British settlers in the Eastern Cape in 1820, she asked: 'Who were the

people living in the eastern Cape before the British', telling the pupils after they had replied 'the Xhosa' that 'the Xhosa were settled in the Eastern Cape — here the chiefs Ngyika and Ndlambe' (1/8/89). But although she adopts more acceptable terms and reminds pupils that the indigenous people had settled the region long before the arrival of white settlers, nevertheless I would argue that she is not locating this new knowledge in a paradigm — these are only new 'facts' in certain lessons rather than a manipulation of historical ideas by her or the pupils. In other words, new bits of history knowledge, alternative facts and so on, might address gaps in her teaching but would not necessarily constitute *emancipatory* knowledge.

This is not to underestimate the importance of exposing teachers to sources beyond the textbooks. In her final interview with me in November 1989, Lumka commented that 'I must know the background of the history, if I'm teaching history I must have the background of that particular part'. She had found the readings 'useful' and wanted to know more about the subject matter because 'I want to know, be clear, on what is taking place so that I can give the children what is needed or what is important'. She explained that 'I'm not having confidence in the textbook' because 'it is not so clear' and 'did not have enough information' (interview 27/11/89).

What is at stake here, then, is the importance of at least initiating a process whereby teachers themselves become critical readers of history. As Smith (1984a) points out, in our concern to emphasise the importance of pupils developing critical thinking skills, we too often neglect a similar concern for their teachers' development of similar capacities. Introducing these teachers to sources alternative to the school textbooks was intended to encourage a process of

engagement with new texts, and at best, introduce some of this thinking into their own lessons.

- ***New instructional practices***

My intention in working with Lumka and other teachers was to involve them in a process in which they would think through new definitions of practice and new materials, adapting these for their own context. Although I had intended to be democratic in working with teachers, I had to learn how to intervene regarding new methods without imposing my ideas, the dilemma explored in Chapter Four. Of course the tension lay in my wanting also to promote my own vision of progressive history teaching. Inevitably this demanded an interventionist role in the process of curriculum change where the dominant form of history teaching involved transmitting information to passive pupils.

Given the large classes of 50 to 60 pupils, minimal resources, and a lengthy syllabus to be completed, such patterns may well have been the most rational response. This method is described by teachers as the 'narrative' or 'telling' method and was sometimes varied with the 'question and answer' method, all involving the whole class repeatedly chanting answers aloud:

Teacher: Right look at this picture, looking at this picture, looking at that picture, the centre one, we say ancient mining. We what?

Class: The ancient mining

Teacher: The what?

Class: The ancient mining

Teacher: The ancient what?

Class: Mining.

Teacher: Right. The ancient mining. That is how the black people mined, that is their way of mining (lesson 16/8/88).

Innovation in methods of teaching was further complicated by the question of language — both the medium of instruction and the language of the subject itself. The language demands of history included the subject register, the readability of the textbook and the teacher's own use of language. Such demands should not be underestimated in the context of DET schools, as I was coming to realise by 1988. Douglas, a colleague of Lumka's, had observed in a conversation with me that pupils struggled with history, not only because of the medium of instruction but also because of the language of history. Even when the children understood the English, he said, they struggled to grasp historical concepts.

Regarding English as medium of instruction, since 1982 pupils had been taught in their mother tongue (Xhosa in the Western Cape) from their first to their fourth year of school (Sub A to Std 2), learning English and Afrikaans as subjects from their second year. These children thus faced the formidable task of learning three languages. Moreover, linguists have estimated that whereas Std 3 pupils need a vocabulary of 8000 English words to cope with English as medium of instruction, they only have about 700 'poorly rehearsed' words by the end of Std 2 (Southey, 1990). MacDonald's research in Boputhatswana primary schools found that teachers had great difficulty in coping with the switch to English in Std 3, even where teachers in Std 2 had been competent English teachers and innovative in their overall approach to teaching:

> We found anxious teachers who were struggling to get their children to understand difficult concepts in English, teachers who were racing against the clock to get their lessons finished, teachers who were no longer using group work in any meaningful way ... At this stage teachers find it difficult to teach and children find it difficult to learn (1988, p. 3).

As Lumka explained:

> The std 3s, they say history, geography, health, all these, because they were taught from the junior primary school in Xhosa, [but] now everything is taught in English, [so] they say 'Oh! it's difficult' (interview 27/11/89).

Another teacher captured the problems facing history teachers who have to teach through the medium of a second language:

> Our kids don't understand English because it's not their first language and we are having difficulty there. Now I have two concerns, that is teaching the language, at the same time as giving the kids the facts and encouraging them to think about the event (Gladstone Mashiyi, discussion, 13/10/88).

This situation is exacerbated by the crippling effects of Bantu education and apartheid group areas which have segregated people by language as much as by colour. Over several decades the standard of school English has declined, for example, matric passes in English fell from 78% in 1978 to 45% in 1983 (Hartshorne, 1987). Hartshorne emphasises that 'it is stating the obvious to say that English-medium can be effective only if both teachers and pupils have the capacity to use English in the classroom at a level appropriate to the learning required by the curriculum ... '

(1987, p. 77). Teachers would often translate from English into Xhosa in the classroom, while the everyday language of the school assemblies, the staff room, the playground and the community was Xhosa.

All this means that in evaluating changes in the teaching of history, what might seem to be limited gains in a context where pupils are learning through a first language, are in fact far more significant in this context, for example, simply sticking to English in lessons and not translating.

- ***Teaching for change, changing teaching***

Episodes from my work with Lumka serve both to illustrate the point I am making that the facilitator needs to teach, not to abdicate power or authority, as well as shifts in Lumka's practice.

- *Episode one 8 February 1989, field notes and transcript extracts: our first meeting to begin planning history lessons.*
  I said: 'Maybe it will help if I give you some of my ideas and then you can choose the ideas you feel comfortable with. It might help then to choose one of your classes and monitor your teaching with that class for us to talk about'. While I allowed space for Lumka to teach using a 'traditional' method, it is really a sham invitation: 'Would you like to try the lesson like this? You can try something more traditional ...' and then: 'You might find it helps if we work collaboratively. I could teach one class and then you teach. Or you teach it, and if it goes well, that's good. If you're struggling you could call on me to help'. At this meeting I also spoke about the role of language in learning, and hence pupils thinking and talking about history, saying: 'Here are two pictures for the children to look at, and they talk to a partner or a group about what they see in the pictures, how the khoikhoi lived,

whether they moved around a lot and so on, so they're thinking about it, they're talking about the pictures and they're building up their own understanding'. The meeting ended with Lumka saying: 'I'll try and see how it goes.'

- *Episode two 27 February, field notes and transcript extracts*
  Faced with some difficulty in implementing group work in the first lesson, something I had strongly recommended, Lumka said: 'I found that others are not doing what I told them, there are [only] a few of them answering questions'. She explained this as 'they did not understand [the text]'. Much later she asked: 'I want to do some more work this term. Can you help me in doing more work?' She then asked me to take a lesson with this same class, the 'weakest' of the three she teaches, agreeing to try the same lesson after that with one of her other two classes. I checked what it was that worried her most, how much content she wanted me to cover, and which methods she wanted me to use. Her greatest concern was the language issue in that she felt she was using too much Xhosa in the lessons, while she wanted me also to try out group work. I dropped off the lesson plan for her to look at before the actual lesson, she observed me teach, and we discussed the lesson together afterwards when Lumka noted: 'I had no idea how to start, how to make the children understand the lesson and that alone helps me and the way they co-operate with others also gave me another experience. I gained when you were teaching them'. Again she asked me to carry on helping her: 'Can we come and meet to do some preparations for the next lessons.' In time, Lumka found collaborative group work important in her teaching because 'I can say that the pupils are following, catching what I'm saying to them'.

- *Episode three: April/May 1989 field notes and transcript extracts*
  I met with Lumka to plan the Shaka lessons. I try now not to come

with finished worksheets and show her how I work, very roughly at first and the materials taking shape through our interactions. So I said things like: 'I wanted you to put your own ideas so I planned it [material on Shaka] very roughly. Do you have any ideas you want to talk about before we start?'. Lumka explained that she had already begun teaching this section using 'the narrative method' (chalk and talk?) so I made various suggestions including reading about the Mfecane and Shaka, the teacher giving explanations, and using clear illustrations to help pupils understand the military innovations Shaka introduced. I explained that if Lumka mixed her own explanation with opportunities for pupil participation and cooperative group work (which she now agrees works well) this would help pupils to develop competence in English and learn that history is not just something they read about in a textbook. I had brought an extract from the fictionalised biography, Shaka by Thomas Mofolo, and explained that 'there are so few black heroes that the children hear about in the history lessons, so it helps to get a feel for what it was like, to put the people in history — it's exciting for the pupils'. The language of the extract was quite difficult for Std 3 but I explained that I hoped that pupils' interest in this dramatic account of the young Shaka killing a lion, and co-operative group work, would enable pupils to cope with the text. Lumka went on to try the story with her classes and we discussed it afterwards on 3 May:

Lumka: *I first read the story for them, then one of them summarised it for me. After that it took them about an hour because they were talking to one another.*

Melanie: *To each other in the group?*

Lumka: *To each other, then they, then one of them summarised it in Xhosa and another one summarised it in English.*

Melanie: *Were the summaries good?*

Lumka: *They were good and Cherry [UCT student] was also there.*

Melanie: *What did she say about the lesson?*

Lumka: *She was impressed about the talking in English. They are the last [weakest] group and the one's who was talking so proudly.*

Melanie: *And when they were talking about the story in their groups did you listen, could you hear the kinds of things they were saying?*

Lumka: *They were talking about the men, the old men who were running away when Shaka was coming to kill the lion, and the women who were not far from the place where Shaka killed the lion. And they were commenting about how this, how they felt after Shaka had killed the lion.*

Melanie: *Do you think they enjoyed the story?*

Lumka: *They enjoyed it, ja.*

Melanie: *Do you think that was a good way for them to get excited about history, hearing a story like that?*

Lumka: *They were discussing, talking to themselves, asking themselves questions, how these people react when they saw, when a young man killed the lion.*

In working with Lumka, I tried also to help her develop materials which required pupils to use language in order to learn language. For example, *The Khoisan* booklet incorporated language development through reading, writing and discussion about the suggested tasks, also using visual information to support understanding in English.

I encouraged her to use only English in her lessons because it seemed to me that teachers assumed too quickly that children did not understand and resorted to Xhosa explanations. Lumka initially had difficulty with this, feeling that 'you have to explain in Xhosa' (planning 8/2/89), but after watching me teach she tried the same lesson with a different class, and spoke only in English. Now she was satisfied that the children had understood, and said she intended to stick to English in future lessons (discussion 14/4/89).

- ***Evaluating change***

By August 1989, Lumka felt confident enough to fill the learning spaces I had left open with her own ideas, saying 'I'm thinking I'm going to give my ideas also of the lesson', following this a few days later with a detailed lesson outline, and a guide to suitable materials based on reading and group discussion. As evidence of where Lumka had moved in her own understanding, by the time we stopped working together in September she was able to plan her own lessons on the voortrekkers which included writing a piece of text for pupils to read and help each other understand, pupils' studying and talking together about a map, and pupils' building a summary. Still, returning to my earlier point regarding the limits of teachers' subject knowledge, I should add that the *content* of these lessons dealing with the voortrekkers followed the textbook closely. Although the methods were innovative, the content certainly was not[4].

By now, too, she interacted comfortably with pupils while they worked, working hard to develop pupil understanding. Moreover, she had developed a greater sensitivity to language use and language medium, evident both in her own use of classroom

language and in her attempts to limit Xhosa translations. As pointed out earlier, the latter was not usual practice in content subjects. For example, the principal of Phakamisa commented on the widespread tendency to 'Xhosa-ise' the lessons. 'We translate too much,' he said, 'we are spoon feeding the children ... but this project has made teachers to realise there's no need for them to be spoon fed' (interview 12/10/89).

History Education lecturer, Rob Sieborger, after watching the video of Lumka's lesson on the 1820 settlers, commented on her use of language, noting that she consciously reinforced terms. For example, she started the lesson with a clear explanation of the reasons for the emigration of the settlers:

> About 200 years ago, the British settlers came to the Cape. They were, they came, because in Britain the jobs were difficult to find and times were hard and they came to the Cape to start a better life (lesson 1/8/89).

And she explained, for example, the meaning of town — 'see it is like a town, there's a lot of houses' (lesson 1/8/89).

In a final interview at the end of November, Lumka reflected on her own teaching and learning. Although she had expected to encounter difficulties in teaching a content subject, instead she had found her pupils 'gained a love of history because it was not so difficult for each person because they were discussing in the class, helping each other'. Thus she had been 'so surprised' at how well the children coped. The principal of her school also commented positively on her use of group work:

> Like the history lesson that was taught in one class, I think it was std 3, where they were discovering for themselves, answering questions, picking them up from the teacher, and looking for the answers because they were working as a group. And that talk amongst themselves, there is a tendency for the teacher to want to be a lecturer in the primary school and he [sic] goes and goes with the lesson ... but with your project I realised that many classes are involving the kids (Mr Magona, interview, 12/10/89).

In evaluating her own practice, Lumka said she 'was doing well although there are still things that I would polish up next time'. She was able to evaluate to some extent different textbooks, preferring *Time for History* because 'the English is simple, it has more information, and it is printed in the 80s'. She felt she had 'gained confidence and improved my teaching', and 'that there is nothing that is difficult in any subject if you are determined to know that subject' (interview 27/11/89).

When a colleague was interviewed early in 1990 by the PREP evaluator, he commented that Lumka had 'found more problems than me [at first], but when we come together with her and discuss these concepts I find she is improving and she tried to help me!' (interview with S. Philcox 4/2/90). In conversation with me the previous year he had remarked on how different Lumka's history lessons were from the dominant telling mode. These classes were 'very motivated', 'interested' and 'they understood' although 'history is the most difficult subject in our school'. Sieborger remarked on Lumka's easy and comfortable management of pupils working in pairs, her attempts to develop understanding inductively, while her use of illustrations to prompt pupil

understanding had 'informed my own thinking'. He thought that the physical arrangement of the classroom of pupils in groups of desks, the confident use of resources, and the breaking away from transmission teaching were all evidence of transformative moments.

This is not to say that old methods did not persist, nor that alternative pedagogical suggestions were not recontextualised. No practice is inherently liberating or oppressive — at times Lumka worked in ways which were different and empowering for students, as Rob Sieborger noted. But there is also evidence of her being caught in dominant transmission practices, not least in her overriding regard for tests and exams, as one would expect in a system where such a pervasive testing paradigm dominates practice. She continued to exhibit a strong concern with knowledge as a product and to use pupil achievement in exams and tests which tested factual recall as the means by which she evaluated the success of her teaching. For example, Lumka remarked at a meeting in July that 'to be sure whether they understand the lesson', she had given pupils a short test. In our final interview she reported that 74% of the Std 3s had passed history, with an average mark of 51%. Her assessment practices thus constrained reshaping the history curriculum.

This is all to be expected in a context where pupils and their parents, as well as the school, regard passing exams as a criteria of successful teaching (if not learning), and where students are promoted, or not, to the next standard only on the basis of these exam results. For as long as this testing paradigm (and an ideology of control) is so powerful, teachers will need to meet its demands in order to win space to experiment with new ideas and materials which encourage understanding rather than rote learning (see

Sieborger *et al.*, 1993). This recognition applies equally to any outside facilitator working with teachers for educational change.

In terms of transforming teaching, a major gap in my work lay in not raising or addressing with teachers the critical question of assessment. As Sieborger *et al.*, (1993) note, for as long as the effects of the public school-leaving matriculation exam have a backwash effect throughout the school system, changing the form and content of the syllabus must also incorporate changes in the form and content of examinations — if such changes are to have any significant impact.

Concern for transmitting knowledge as product was also evident in Lumka's work, for example, in her response to my question on what she thought pupils had learned in her lesson on the 1820 settlers. She explained that they now knew when the British settlers had arrived, where they had settled and the people with whom they had mixed — in other words they knew the 'facts'. In our final interview she noted that 'I want to know, to be clear on what is taking place so that I can give the children what is needed or what is important'.

Curriculum development in senior primary reading

Beatrice Dlamini

Beatrice had been teaching for six years when she and I began to work together in 1988. Her in-service experience at that time was limited to a 'remedial' course undertaken in 1985 and about which she was quite vague. A teacher at Sizithabathele school, she herself had left school at the end of 1974, completing her matric part-time while working as a char, the only job she could then find. Reflecting

on her own schooling experiences, Beatrice recalled the widespread use of corporal punishment in her primary school:

> The worst thing was the corporal punishment so I don't know whether they [the teachers] were good or not because every day when you go to school you were just thinking of the corporal punishment you were going to receive. Every day you come to school, you stand against the wall, you are fired with questions, if you don't know the answer, the teacher beats you! (interview, 20/7/89).

After finally matriculating, she studied for a two-year diploma from 1980-1981 at a Ciskei teachers' college and began teaching in 1982. Like most DET teachers, her training was fixated on 'methods', narrowly and mechanistically understood: 'We were taught all the methods of teaching — let's say all ten methods — deductive, inductive, self-activity, all the methods were taught'.

* *Teaching reading in the senior primary school*

In senior primary schools, reading formed part of the English syllabus which had as its over-riding aim 'communicative competence for personal, social, educational and occupational purposes' (*DET Syllabus for English*, 1986). Reading was seen as important and pupils were to be encouraged to read both for enjoyment and information. The syllabus emphasised 'pronunciation, phrasing and fluency', 'extension of vocabulary and comprehension' and 'reading aloud ... with good articulation, acceptable pronunciation and some attempt at variety of tone'. Making meaning (not 'comprehension') of text was not mentioned, and the reading lesson in practice was usually limited to 'reading-

comprehension' over one or, at most two, 30-minute English periods a week.

A comprehension test of about 100 words was set in the final examination, counting 50 marks, half the total of 100. In addition reading aloud was to be tested and counted a further ten marks out of an oral mark of 30. Like the other subjects then, there was an emphasis on testing. As Smith (1984b) notes, the danger is that teachers, pupils and their parents think that literacy 'instruction', and the tests and exercises *are* reading and writing.

All the schools relied on class readers, which, like all prescribed reading programmes are underpinned by an interest in control (Smith, 1984b). According to teachers at Sizithabathele, they had no say in the choice of readers. Even though a list would be sent by the DET, teachers' choices were ultimately ignored and 'the DET sent the same old books as before'.

The reading series prescribed for Beatrice's Std 5 pupils, *English Readers* by Barnes and Dugard, strongly emphasised phonics. It then followed that the most important thing in teaching reading was fluency and accuracy in the pronunciation of words. Indeed, the reader emphasised that 'correct sounds should be mastered before the pupils attempt to read'. There was no concern with reading for meaning, rather 'it is not necessary to teach the meanings of the words in the tables'! 'Weaknesses' in pronunciation were to be 'drilled' 'until the fault has been remedied.' English is regarded as a 'foreign' language, and black children are pathologized as learners with 'problems' in learning English: 'There is a tendency on the part of the Black student to speak and write a type of English which may be called Black English.' But help is to hand! The (white) authors of

the series had attempted 'to apply the most modern and scientific principles and methods to the needs of our [sic] Black children'. Finally, they included two extra lessons with a 'larger vocabulary' for 'brighter children'.

Now the stories selected were not uniformly bad. Some were certainly dull and boring: for example, 'The Rivers of Africa' and a dialogue titled 'Breathe through your nose'. Others bore no relation to authentic communication ('A letter to Hilda' and 'Hilda replies'), while the African folk tales had some interest value. As Smith (1984b) reminds us, teachers work in less than ideal circumstances (especially teachers in Bantu education), and it is 'often difficult, if not impossible' to eliminate prescribed readers imposed by education authorities.

Still, an emancipatory and critical approach to literacy would involve, according to Smith:

> ... lots of collaborative and meaningful reading and writing activities, the kind of things that are characterised as extras, rewards or even 'frills', things like stories (reading and writing), poems, plays, letters, newspapers, magazines, posters, menus, notes, packages, reviews ... (1984b, p. 120).

Changing practice in the teaching of reading should be evaluated by the extent that new practices shifted in the direction of a critical approach to literacy, for example in collaborative teaching methods, meaningful reading materials, a more critical and selective approach to the existing reader, and teachers' understanding of the process of reading itself.

The development of critical literacy involves both access to a range of different texts and a different process of learning from the dominant teaching method of drill and repetition, illustrated in this lesson extract:

Teacher: And when did this [the wedding] take place? When did this take place? Mind the past tense of take. When did this take place? This took, when did this, yes?

Pupil: This took place last week.

Teacher: Class.

Class: This took place last week.

Teacher: This happened last week, this happened last week.

Class: Last week.

Teacher: When did this happen class?

Class: This happened last week.

Teacher: When did this happen?

Class: It happened last week.

Teacher: Very good. It happened last week. Why was everybody there? Why was everybody there? Yes.

Pupil: Everybody was there because it was the wedding of the year.

Teacher: Class.

Class: Everybody was there because it was the wedding of the year.

Teacher: Class.

Class: Everybody was there because it was the wedding of the year.

Teacher: Because it was the wedding of the year (lesson 7/3/89).

Before joining the project, a typical reading lesson for Beatrice had consisted, she said, of her explaining the difficult words listed at the beginning of each story, having the children pronounce and spell these words correctly, followed by the whole class reading aloud, and then answering the questions at the end of each story.

* ***Beatrice experiments with a new method, March 1988***

Given my lack of specialist knowledge, I asked Wendy Flanagan to run a workshop on reading for Beatrice and others at Sizithabathele. Here she outlined a way of teaching reading in which she emphasised children actively using, not merely copying, language. She was careful to explain the reasons behind her ideas, for example, that it was important for pupils to say which words they did not understand, rather than learning the words the writers of the textbook had decided all readers would not understand.

Following this workshop, Beatrice experimented with a new way of teaching reading, sticking quite closely, however, to the method suggested by Flanagan. Thus she chose a story from the reader ('The Twelve Months') which the pupils first read silently 'keeping the words you do not understand'; then listing these words on the chalkboard; reading the story aloud with the pupils reading after her; having volunteer pupils make sentences to explain the meanings of the difficult words; pupils reread the story aloud; volunteers were asked to retell the story; and, finally, Beatrice asked the pupils if they had enjoyed the story.

This lesson was videotaped, and we met to watch it on 30 March, together with Cynthia Bengu, a Std 3 colleague. Beatrice had found that it took most of the lesson just for pupils to say which words they found difficult and for the pupils and teacher to explain the meanings of these words. I noticed pupils becoming very bored, while Cynthia pointed out that pupils were providing 'everyday words that they know the meaning of' so that the lesson became an exercise in getting the difficult words right, rather than as providing an enjoyable and meaningful reading activity. I proposed that we adapt the method by having the pupils work in groups in which they helped each other with the English. The teacher would move around from group to group helping as well, where necessary:

> The other thing that you might want to think about doing is group work, put pupils together in groups so the learning is more powerful, where they can share ideas and help each other. The points in the lesson when I thought that could happen were the difficult words, instead of them working on that as a class, they work in groups (discussion 30/3/88).

Later I added:

> And the other point at which it seemed groups could be introduced was the retelling of the story — to practice retelling the story in English, first in groups, and then more children will be involved in trying to retell (discussion 30/3/88).

* *Theory and practice*

In July 1988 I wrote up a revised version of the workshop reading method as a result of Beatrice's and other senior primary teachers'

classroom experiments. I was concerned to find ways of facilitating teacher judgment of practice, rather than only rule-following. In planning sessions with the teachers and in workshops my concern had been not only to develop knowledge of teaching techniques, but also teachers' understanding of the rationale for the new methods.

This point underscores the one made earlier in this chapter regarding Lumka's lack of a consciously articulated historical paradigm and a well developed concept of history. In the same way, there was a significant difference between simply trying new ideas, compared to shifting one's thinking from seeing reading as pronunciation and word recognition, to seeing reading as a process of making meaning, while also understanding the philosophy underpinning different approaches to reading practice. It seemed important to theorise in the context of action, that is, a process in which theory was mediated by reflective practice. Thus, at the end of July 1988, I wrote that I thought one needed 'to inform teachers about process, not just providing finished recipes or solutions'.

Additionally, then, the principles underpinning the methodology were introduced in the context of action, not to direct it but to deepen reflection. The booklets which I prepared for junior and senior primary teachers both cited Smith's (1978) argument that what will make a difference to the teaching of reading is an understanding of the reading process. In the higher primary booklet, the reworked method explained the reasons for action, citing specialists to support the use of interesting texts, silent reading and the idea that 'learning is social — so allowing pupils to work together should strengthen the quality of their learning and understanding' (Senior Primary Reading Booklet — *Learning to read*

is done by reading, reading and more reading). I explained why I had prepared the booklet in this way when I met teachers at the beginning of the third term:

> The other thing I'm trying to do, and what I tried to do in the framework of the reworked reading lesson [in the booklet], was to try and include what people who are 'authorities' on the teaching of reading say about it so that teachers begin to understand processes. In other words, so that I don't just come with a recipe that says step one, step two, without people knowing *why* it's being done in that way. I think teachers are empowered when they know why they teach reading in this way as opposed to only knowing how to teach reading (discussion 8/7/88).

A reading workshop, October 1988

Given the difficulty of working without DET support, the reading workshop was the only occasion during the project in which senior primary reading teachers from the different schools were able to meet and share ideas. Beatrice and seven other project teachers attended the workshop held at UCT, together with master's student, Lufuno Nevathalu as the participant observer. Wanting to confirm the central contribution of teachers to developing good practice, I had asked Beatrice if we might watch extracts from her videotaped lesson of 'The Twelve Months'. Ideally we should have chosen these extracts together but time always worked against us: there never seemed to be enough time for Beatrice to watch the video again in order to select from it:

[The lesson begins — the pupils read silently]
Ruth: But at times some of the children don't read, they pretend

as if they are reading [silently] and when you ask them questions, you find they did not read the story.

Cynthia: I think what she says is correct, but some of them do read, and when they [the pupils] were asked [in my lesson] they said they prefer silent reading because they could read at their own pace and nobody was disturbing them, and they understand what they are reading. But there will always be kids who are not reading. Even if the teacher is reading [aloud], there will be kids who are not listening. I think silent reading is more successful.

Nomonde: The silent reading is new to them.

Melanie: I wonder then if it's that children need to learn to be silent readers? And the more they do it the better they will become.

Cynthia: I think if they know they will have to speak, they will read. But I don't know how a person will get them all to speak, how they will all get a turn to speak, then they have to read.

Melanie: With large classes you maybe need to call on different groups week by week, keeping a record of who you've asked.

[The video continues — explaining difficult words]

Ruth: She's trying to use grammar in the reading lesson.

Melanie: And she builds on what the children know.

Lufuno: The integrating of the English and the Science is very good!

[The video continues — the pupils retell at the end of the lesson]

Melanie: What Beatrice does is she doesn't ask one child to do it all.

Walter: I think it is better to do difficult words in groups, not individually, because when they give words as individuals, the whole board is going to be full of words.

Melanie: Which is what happened here. It was a very slow part of the lesson.

Zolani: The kids can read themselves and understand the words without my interference, the kids can understand the word now by reading up the context without explaining that this word means this, now form a sentence using the word.

Melanie: Walter, how do you find it in Xhosa, do they tend to understand the words?

Walter: Sometimes they tend, even simple words, they say they don't understand. So it's better in a group whereby some simple words they can get it from the groups, help each other.

Nomonde: I also got the same problem, my blackboard was full of words.

Melanie: Have you tried groups, Walter?

Walter: Yes.

Melanie: And did it work well?

Walter: Yes it worked well.

Lumka: The children can share ideas. They can take a word and make a sentence for the class.

Melanie: To help everybody understand.

Zolani: You can do a reading lesson without being a teacher talking for the whole time.

Melanie: What do others think?

Beatrice: To me sometimes you must correct a child but you must not do it every time. Sometimes you must ignore the mistakes because the child is not going to talk if you keep correcting. But at the end you just correct the mistakes.

Melanie: What is the point of the teacher correcting the language?

John: You can say the child must speak the language fluently.

Melanie: And also they get the correct language from the teacher. So if you pick up on Beatrice's point, you need to be sensitive to the children.

Beatrice: I think that last part of the reading lesson, the pupils were not successful in retelling the story, so I think you must time yourself and give the groups more time so that the pupils can be able to respond.

Cynthia: I think it's very good that she doesn't tell the kids 'no you are wrong', because if they feel the story is true and then they support it, I think you should accept that, though maybe she could say at the end of the lesson, this is a fable, but allow the kids at first their own opinions.

Melanie: And she keeps asking what is your reason for saying that.

Beatrice: Say why, mmm.

Melanie: Anybody else want to comment? Lumka do you want to talk a bit about what you did in your Xhosa lesson because you also asked interpretive questions in your lesson.

Lumka: I asked them how do they feel about the girl Lena who was badly treated by the [white] farmer.

Melanie: And the question you asked them about the writer?

Lumka: I asked them how they feel about the writer. They said the writer who writes this story was experiencing the story, and I asked how they feel about the whole situation of the bad treatment by the farmer.

Melanie: Any other comments?

Walter: I asked them about the writer in the Nyanga story. They said the writer is not from Nyanga ... The pictures of Nyanga, the story, did not quite fit (discussion 5/10/88).

What is significant here is that this group of teachers had been thinking about their work, experimenting, and taking up the agentic position of curriculum developer. In my thesis I therefore wrote:

> *The discussion shows them [teachers] learning to assert their voices and agency in the process of curriculum development and change. I would further argue that the form of the discussion is an instance of dialogical relations contrary to the form of interaction teachers were most used to in schools, and in their dealings with the DET. Underpinning the discourse is a respect for personal*

experience which allows uncertainties and recognises all contributions, whatever the level of participation.

* *1989 – Further developments*

By 1989 Beatrice had spent a year experimenting with reading lessons. In September of the previous year she had reflected on shifts in her practice, saying:

> Now I've got a new way of approaching reading, I've got a new way of approaching language lessons previously which I did not do, and now I'm also learning to space my periods. Let's just say trying to train myself what I'm going to do in a reading lesson and then I'm going to use one period – which approach must I use, and then if I'm going to have two periods for reading, which approach must I use, and then that way I complete my lesson. ... A change has taken place, and if you have got many ways of teaching the pupils, the pupils become interested you see. If you come to the class then you are going to do reading. They know, oh, she's going to do it like this, they are not interested. I'm changing my methods of teaching and the kids are benefitting but it's going to take time. I mean the teachers who join [the project] next year they must not expect to have rapid results, it's a long process. First of all the teacher must also try to learn, and then don't expect the kids to be, let's say if you change today, they are also going to follow you today. No, they are going to take time, sometimes the kids don't want to talk and then you become miserable, you must not be confused about that, you must try again, keep on trying you see. It's a long process, then the kids learn to do what you are telling

> them because the first thing they don't want to talk when you are doing a reading lesson, and then you give them those [difficult] words, telling them to try and explain for themselves, they won't talk for the first time, but you must keep on trying to tell them that they must talk (interview 27/9/88).

She had shifted into encouraging pupils to work in groups in order to help each other understand the English and to practise retelling the story. By now she also felt that what was important was rather that the pupils should 'know the language' and 'it doesn't matter what material you are using'. I therefore offered to bring resources 'that I think the pupils might be interested in', but she should choose what she wanted to use. Beatrice was clear, too, that she wanted to continue experimenting with reading, and she had some changes of her own in mind:

> Now I want to try each week, one group to retell the story, the following week another group. Not like last year when I let one child tell the story and then the other one continues from there. And then I thought, I don't know if its going to work out, let's say the other group retells the story and then the other group I give them an assignment: can't you write let's say about five sentences about the lesson which we read. And then I'll see if they can come out with the most important parts of the lesson (discussion 26/1/89).

She planned to continue with comprehension-type questions because 'the principal wants to have those short questions about the who, what, how', but also because pupils:

> ... just read without understanding and secondly, when they answer they just do this scanning, they look at the words, oh it's about 'like', they just look for the word 'like' ... I think they haven't learnt the skills. They can do it if they have the skills.

She intended evaluating her teaching according to the confidence and enthusiasm with which pupils were able to retell a story:

> Let's say if you finish the lesson and there are no hassles you just ask them who can tell us the story and then they are all keen to stand up and tell you the story so you will know that at least you are coming out with something. Because sometimes after reading the lesson nobody wants to start. There's no confidence.

Beatrice also asked me to teach her Std 5 class. Like Lumka in History, Beatrice said she had been concerned to see how the pupils responded to a first language English speaker. Her comment the previous year to Lufuno Nevathalu suggests a further reason for asking me to teach. On this occasion she had remarked that she thought I should have taken a lesson:

> ... to experience it from her own side, maybe she could see how to cope with the children. Sometimes it's easier to say you must do this but when you do it yourself you experience the problem, and then you see, I don't know how to do it (interview, 27/9/88).

I agreed to do a lesson, understanding better by now Howell's (1986) and Clandinin's (1986) point that observing somebody else teach (as had happened using video at the reading workshop in

October, and in my history lesson for Lumka) can be useful for reflection. One places oneself in the role of, and imagines oneself as that teacher, but without taking the risk of judging one's own action. Thus, Clandinin notes that a teacher can 'make judgements both on his [sic] own imagined practices and on the practice of the demonstrating teacher' (1986, p. 175).

Thus far I have suggested that there is space to construct a 'visual argument' through such work but it needs to be work alongside teachers, rather than instead of their own experiments, or as a model for them to copy. Further, it seems that observing the facilitator teach might be a means for a teacher to evaluate the facilitator's claim to practical teaching knowledge in the light of contextual realities. (Although this seems to further confirm the need for the facilitator to have at least some degree of specialist knowledge, unless specialists are available both to give demonstration lessons and participate in follow-up work with teachers.) Certainly I would argue that one should not dismiss demonstration lessons. The point is how such a strategy is contextualised within the broader process of facilitating teachers' own reflective practice.

• *Not So Fast Songololo, August 1989*

This lesson captures some of the shifts Beatrice had made over the eighteen months we had worked together. On this occasion Beatrice chose an extract from *Not So Fast Songololo* by Niki Daly, a story of a small boy's journey to town with his grandmother, and one of various non-prescribed texts I had left with her over the months. I prepared the materials for her — enlarging the illustrations on a photocopier, preparing the sentence strips, and so on.

We had also talked about teaching pupils the skill of retelling a story because I had noticed that in many classes (not only Beatrice's) they tried to learn the story off by heart in the available time. Thus we had been experimenting with writing main ideas on strips of paper, jumbling these up and then having pupils sequence them in a logical order. Thereafter they tried to retell the story for themselves.

Beatrice began the lesson by telling the story using the blown up illustrations from the book and main ideas written onto strips of computer paper. She also asked a few questions:

B: Why does Gogo not go to town alone?
P: She is old.
P: She is afraid of cars.
B: How do the hands of the grandmother look?
P: They are big.
T: Are they hard or soft?
P: They are hard because they are working.

She then asked pupils to read the text 'quietly with a friend' helping each other with difficult words and urging them to 'read and reread' a sentence if they did not understand all the words. She walked around helping if needed, encouraging pupils to use the illustrations to help them understand words like 'squashes', 'scolded' and 'wagging'. She then asked them to read again and to think about what might happen when Gogo and Shepherd go to town. She began reading aloud, the pupils reading after her but from the second paragraph she had the pupils read aloud in groups. Pupils then rearranged the jumbled main ideas, and groups were given time to practise retelling the story before three volunteers retold the story with more confidence and skill than had been the case with

pupils the previous year. Finally, she asked each group to work out two sentences to explain what they thought would happen when Gogo and Shepherd went to town.

'And every time I'm sure you learn a new thing from your lesson'

The following is a narrative constructed from Beatrice's reflections in our final interview in October 1989. My concern here is not to analyse the interaction in the interview, although this obviously shapes what was said, but to foreground Beatrice's voice as she reflects on her own learning:

> I've changed. Because before we met you we were just doing the reading lesson and we were emphasising that the children must be able to answer the questions that are in the reading book, after they read the reading lesson. That's what we emphasised. But during the project the pupils were able to work in groups, then they were learning with understanding, retelling the story. So I think that's important. Because you can read a lesson and finish it but you don't understand it, but by retelling you understand. Now I think group work is good for the children. Even the shy ones are going to participate. If you keep on using individuals, the shy ones won't have a chance.
>
> I think the teacher must give the pupils a chance to work for themselves. Then they understand. Let's say, give them group work, maybe to complete an assignment, not working as individuals, or only the teacher emphasising the points to the class. Let the children find out the important points of the lesson.

I'm able to communicate with my class much better than before. And I think the pupils have benefitted because at the end of the lesson the child can stand up and tell the story. And they are not shy to tell the story.

The kids must be aware of the things that are happening at the moment because our kids don't read the newspapers. Maybe you give them an article about New Crossroads or Khayalitsha or the election of the president. Even if some of this material does not fit with the curriculum, it fits with the environment of the children. We must concentrate on enjoyment and understanding so I choose relevant material. But not fairy tales. They are not interested in them.

I think it's good to attend a workshop with other teachers. I mean from the workshop you see the things happening. Let's say a teacher is going to present a lesson for you in that workshop. You *see* it, more than just having a lecturer lecturing you. So that is effective. When you go back to your school then you can remember all those things.

As a teacher I think you must not stand at one point, you must change as times change. Education does not stop. That's what I'm discovering. Because if you say, alright I've got all the training, I'm going to teach my class like this, but education is changing every day. I've gained new things from when I was coming from the college, because in the college you only gain theory. When you arrive in the field it's different. Then you've got to do it practically. So I've learnt new practical skills.

> I see myself as a teacher-researcher because I've learnt new things, meaning that as a teacher you must always go on researching. If you talk about your lessons then you improve on that lesson. If you look back you improve because the next reading lesson, maybe you are going to do the same thing, thinking that's its worthwhile to do it, but it was not worthwhile.

How far all this pushed at the edges, troubled or disrupted the dominant culture of teaching and classroom practices, I shall reflect on in the next chapter.

Notes

1 Curriculum here is taken to mean the official course of study made up of documents covering various age levels and school standards, together with statements of aims and sets of subject syllabi, the whole constituting the rules, regulations and principles to guide what should be taught (Tomkins, 1986).

2 Research published in 1990 by Third Alternative, a group of concerned businessmen, showed that 30% of black households did not have a single book (*Cape Times* 6/8/90). Moreover, public library facilities in the townships are barely adequate.

3 I had a master's degree in history and had taught the subject for several years in senior secondary schools.

4 Yet this problem is by no means confined only to DET primary schools. Sieborger's (1988) work with history teachers from an elite private primary school, revealed the history syllabus to be 'deep-frozen'. While the teachers with whom he worked had the freedom and resources to change the syllabus, he found that they 'accepted unquestioningly the content matter'.

Chapter Six

Pushing at the edges

> '... to tolerate disruptions of the taken-or-granted is the beginning of education.' — Maxine Greene

For three years, then, I worked as a university-based research officer 'to test action research as a strategy for practising teachers to improve the quality of educational provision in South African classrooms'. Mine was local work, generating local knowledge about teacher development. But it was also work which tried, on however small a scale, to develop a vision of a different form of INSET, underpinned by values of democracy, co-operation, and care for teachers and pupils. What was finally at stake was 'to recognize that current regimes [including pedagogical regimes] need not be as they are, to continually identify and squeeze into those spaces of freedom' (Gore, 1993, p. 156). At the very least, my work with teachers in these 'spaces of freedom' helped to explore the construction of a counter discourse of a rather different form of INSET from that dominant in these schools which reinforced a lack of respect for teachers and principals and the denial of teachers' voices.

An adventure in self-reflection

I had set out to use the methodology of action research in order to find out whether this would empower teachers, enabling rather than imposing learning and change. Moreover, because action research

was being used as a method of working with teachers, I had felt it important to research my own learning, not patronizingly expecting others to do it.

How curriculum change is supported by outsiders in teacher development projects is at issue here. While the theory of non-directive facilitation of teacher development fitted well with my democratic values, in practice it also proved problematic where teachers lacked access to alternative ways of conceptualising educational practice. Expecting teachers to somehow mysteriously metamorphose from where they were into self-reflective practitioners was overly optimistic. This also raised in my own dilemmas a central tension in action research, as Noffke's (1989) historical analysis shows, between the democratic impulse and a social engineering element.

In my own work, the underlying intent had been to provide support which enabled teachers to take control of their practice and to construct their own pedagogical meanings — an emancipatory INSET praxis and what 'empowerment' might signify in specific institutional contexts coded by wider relations of power. That this was seldom easy under the existing conditions in DET primary schools has been made clear. Moreover, emancipatory action (more than only critical thought) is itself a site of struggle and contestation, and relations of domination will resurface. Yet this does not absolve myself as facilitator from reflexively recognising and understanding those aspects of my intervention which made sense, and those times and places where I stumbled or even enacted oppressive practice. Facilitation that accorded with my own educational values was never easy or uncomplicated. Quite the reverse. It was messy, difficult, and often frustrating.

As I came to understand, my real responsibility was to change myself — what I do and say for myself, searching and struggling for the social spaces in which I might develop greater awareness of the practices of self, in order to alter my own practices (Gore, 1993). As Allman finally reminds us, until educators undertake this work 'they can hardly pretend to be preparing themselves or others to undertake the larger-scale and more essential changes that are necessary' (1988, p. 98).

Pessimism and promise

* *Promising moves*

Overall, teacher development was at best uneven — some teachers dropped out, others sustained their enthusiasm, some continued to hold instrumentalist views of practice, others began to theorize practice, making significant leaps in understanding.

Nonetheless, the most obvious point demonstrated by the work of Lumka and Beatrice is that given the opportunity and support teachers can and will experiment, reflect on, and change their pedagogical practices to improve pupil learning. Moreover, an enabling policy climate and less repressive social context would clearly make a difference, pushing far beyond what was possible in PREP under different conditions. Even so, in talking about changes in their teaching, Lumka and Beatrice began to articulate their own theories about effective teaching and to contribute to useful knowledge for curriculum development in reading and History.

I also found that the distinctions between technical, practical and emancipatory forms of knowledge were blurred. Teachers wanting to hone their technical ability should not be labelled as

demonstrating a transcendent technical interest where the social context has deliberately sought to stifle this skills development. As McWilliam comments 'we need not understand "how to do" needs talk as the hallmark of the potential teacher/technicist but as the legitimate request of the potential teacher advocate' (1992b, p. 15). Moreover, even where new methods could not be consistently implemented, what was important was that teachers had been exposed to models of different practices. As Campbell notes:

> ...to demonstrate by empirical research that classroom reality does not match ideal images is to miss the point about such images, which are designed to represent values not reality. Images of 'good practice' are offered as concentrated ideas to a profession whose vision is often obscured by the hectic, draining and pragmatic demands of their everyday context (1985, p. 150).

The twin processes of reflective practice and curriculum development in PREP *did* help teachers develop technical and practical skills which helped them work towards change in their classrooms. More than this, it also generated empowering and personally emancipatory moments for teachers evident in the following comments drawn from interviews by the project evaluator early in 1990:

- Our lives have changed.
- I am confident to say what I want.
- I know what and how to teach — I do not just accept.
- I will not return to my old methods.
- I now listen to my pupils.
- My pupils are no longer passive.
- In this project you are not afraid to criticise and be criticised. (Philcox, 1991, pp. 89-91)

A principal summed it up: 'We like to have teachers as learners in the schools' (quoted in Philcox, 1991, p. 93). The point surely is that if teachers do not experience empowering educational processes for themselves, how are they to value and provide these for their pupils? As Sarason (1990) has recently argued, efforts to change schools must involve and sustain the professional engagement of teachers — schools exist for teachers as well as for students.

Besides, the experiential learning and personal knowledge production integral to teachers' learning in this project was the direct antithesis of imposed knowledge and hierarchical relationships whether within schools, between schools and education authorities or between schools and universities:

> Knowing, whatever its level, is not the act by which a subject, transformed into an object, docilely and passively accepts the contents others give or impose on him or her. Knowledge, on the contrary, necessitates the curious presence of subjects confronted with the world. It requires their transforming action on reality. It demands a constant searching. It implies invention and re-invention ... in the learning process the only person who really learns is s/he who appropriates what is learned, who apprehends and thereby reinvents that learning; s/he who is able to apply the appropriated learning to concrete existential situations (Paulo Freire quoted in McTaggart, 1989, p. 6).

Moreover, enhancing teachers' own intellectual abilities through experiential learning and reflective practice seems a prerequisite for their developing their pupils' higher order cognitive skills.

I found that reflective teaching and action research had to be situated within a process of curriculum development. What then emerged was the importance of specialist help in exposing teachers to alternatives. The view of such help that emerged was similar to what Verduin (1967) describes as a 'co-operative' approach to change. While the specialists may offer suggestions, the teachers themselves 'weigh the various ideas and select those which are appropriate'. Verduin distinguishes between specialist help and the 'expert':

> If the educator does not have an active part in effecting change and does not know the rationale behind it, it will have less meaning and interest for him [sic] ... Thus curriculum changes handed down by experts are not likely to be implemented (1967, p. 32).

The point is to decentre the all-knowing, 'expert' voice of the teacher-educator, to involve teachers, yet without abdicating the authority and expertise of the specialist and the pedagogy of the good argument.

Primary school practice – a cautionary note

Threaded through my account are signs of a commitment to a different form of primary school practice from drill and practice and rote learning. This obviously influenced the instructional strategies I explored with teachers. Broadly this might be described as learning-centred and was certainly influenced by notions of British child-centred primary practice. At the time I did not appreciate that a version of this child-centred discourse had penetrated even DET classrooms which I had taken to be wholly dominated by the discourse and educational practices of fundamental pedagogics.

Reviewing my thesis, I am now struck by statements by teachers and principals in support of a child-centred discourse. For example:

- Pupil participation is important so that the teacher doesn't take centre stage.
- The pupil must get the chance for self-discovery and creative learning.
- I believe in the group work where children are allowed to work freely and where a teacher is only talking for a couple of minutes.
- We are preparing them to be adults so they must be free outside.
- ... the children must be free.
- Most of the time they must do the talking, not the teacher, everything must be done by the children.
- It's not possible to apply all the methods, for instance if you wanted to give individual attention it would be almost impossible in a class of 47.

I, however, advocated group work as a collaborative process of learning, not as it might be understood in much 'progressive' primary practice where groups often mean groups of individuals working separately, or group work primarily as a means to inculcate social skills rather then to promote cognitive development. Thus collaborative work and this latter form of group work should not be conflated. Collaborative learning involves developing a learning community in which learners control their own learning and construct meaning, rather than only receiving knowledge.

Both Lumka and Beatrice, and others in the project did experiment with group activities to develop competencies, rearranging the layout of their classrooms to facilitate this, constructing group tasks

to be worked on collaboratively, encouraging pupils to help each other, and having groups report rather than individuals. In Beatrice's case she also set group projects to be done outside of class time.

Nonetheless it is also important to note Walkerdine's (1984, 1990) trenchant critique of the oppressive elements of a child-centred pedagogy. She (1984) deconstructs the British primary school's dominant discourse of child-centred practice as comprising its own regime of truth which makes possible what can be said and what can be done in schools and classrooms.

Originally a primary school teacher from a working class background herself, Walkerdine (1990) recounts how she and other progressive primary school teachers in England linked repressive and regimented teaching methods and overt surveillance with inner-city poverty. They dreamt, she says, of personal freedom for their pupils through liberating pedagogical practices. But in this dream the teacher was cast in the role of the oppressor — for the children to be free, the teacher had to abdicate. Freedom would be freedom from overt control and cruel authoritarianism. Yet, this, she argues vehemently, is 'a sham', a sham which presents power as a fixed possession so that power equals authoritarianism, and absence of power equals helpful teacher and democratic relations. Thus Walkerdine does not subscribe to the view that progressivism frees working class children. Rather, it only makes oppression invisible.

The classroom becomes the social space where the teacher must come to know every child and is held responsible for the development of each individual child — 'an impossible fiction'. Here power is denied as if the teacher does not wield any. Moreover, teachers suffer guilt because they must provide freedom,

blaming themselves when they fail to develop 'reason's dream of democratic harmony'.

This discourse constitutes, she argues, a set of historically specific truth claims which are not the only or the necessary way to understand children. Underpinning her argument is a critique of developmental psychology which constructs a normalized sequence of child development productive of 'the child'. Even, she cautions, if not all classrooms are child-centred, the 'parameters of the practice are given by the common sense of child development'.

* ***Pessimistic moves***

There are clear echoes here of the dilemmas I confronted in my own practice, and of Bernstein's (1971) conceptualisation of visible and invisible pedagogies. The point is not to take for granted that 'independent learning', 'child-centred approaches', and so on will 'liberate' teachers and children. Rather, the remarkable uniformity of pedagogical practice across a range of times and countries suggests that pedagogy constitutes its own regime of truth (Bernstein, 1990; Gore, 1993). This presents exciting possibilities for empirical research into classroom pedagogy (preferably with rather than on teachers) and the implementation of INSET programmes. In a promising recent example Galant (1994), following Bernstein (1990), examines how social relations within the classroom shape the possibilities for teachers to transform their practice.

What was clear in my own study was that the organisation of the school, a site of wider political power struggles, also set limits on how far new practices and policies might become institutionalised, and that teacher perceptions of possibility were constructed through these lenses, reinforcing the view and undermining confidence

amongst teachers that they were not curriculum developers. Moreover, our pedagogical work together was embedded in the same regulative discourse — that of apartheid education supporting powerfully entrenched interests in a society structured by differences of race, class and gender.

Besides, it remains difficult for us to understand the ways in which these social inequalities are imbricated in patterns of everyday interpersonal relations in schools and the structure of schooling:

> Schools seem to resemble natural processes: what happens in them appears to have the sanction of natural law and can no more be questioned or resisted than the law of gravity (Greene, 1985 in Smyth 1987, p. 156).

In my own work, it was then not surprising, however much I might have wished it otherwise, that a necessarily reformist starting point did not develop in a radical direction. For example, isolated lessons never developed into a fundamental challenge to the curriculum and the interests shaping it, nor was teacher action located within organised teacher struggles. Arguably, it would have been access to a political discourse which would have transformed these isolated moments of change into a consistent and sustained analysis of teachers' problems and the educational system. These instances of improved practice coupled with complaints about working conditions did not develop a new account of what it meant to be a teacher, nor link this to sets of concrete demands on which teachers might act in the interests of 'everybody's children' (Zeichner, 1993). Having said that, the danger is always that teacher development becomes an end in itself — increased self-knowledge but not increased social justice (Zeichner, 1993), even

where grassroots work for improved classroom practice might demonstrate practical strategies for better schooling.

It may be that a strong teachers' union will create, under different conditions of possibility in the future, a political narrative which provides a coherent account of education for social justice. It may equally, of course, become cramped and confined by narrow professional struggles over higher wages and teacher retrenchments, as we have recently witnessed. Sadly, teachers have also demonstrated at times that holding democratic political beliefs is no passport to practising social justice in their classrooms.

Revisiting action research

Deciding how to go about action research in my particular situation was the basis of my learning about the theory and practice of action research. Yet, as I was to discover, where action research had developed in Northern settings it had been grounded in existing teacher cultures receptive to teacher-led innovation and reflective practice. By contrast, no similar culture on which to build research and development endeavours existed in DET primary schools in 1987 so that teachers were unfamiliar with any notion of themselves as curriculum shapers.

My South African experience showed that reflection in itself was not enough to shift existing practice where teachers lacked models of quality practice, and even technical teaching skills. Nor was acquiring practical skills and reflecting on classroom action, if divorced from critical analysis, a sufficient condition for the development of emancipatory education either. My own work suggests that the process of enquiry itself, while it may help

develop classroom skills, will not *necessarily* shift into a critique of the contexts of that practice in the absence of a political discourse. This is the greatest limitation of action research — there is no inherently liberating logic in the research process itself. As Gore (1991) reminds us, the term 'action research' 'has no meaning outside its construction in particular discourses' (p. 47). This raises the possibility that action research may be stripped of its emancipatory potential in certain contexts and under unfavourable working conditions — a review rather than a new view, commonsense and not good sense. Action research might thus be domesticated as improvement only rather than transformative change, a set of research techniques divorced from a broader democratic approach to social research and reform.

* *Was my own action research emancipatory?*

Furthermore, I had set out to do emancipatory action research focusing on my own educational practice in working alongside teachers. Yet, in practice, my second-order action research remained a black-box mystery. Ideally, teachers should have been part of a critical community but this would be to beg the question of the real power differences between a white university-based facilitator and African primary school teachers. Teachers knew from the start of the project that I was a 'researcher' — that I was 'researching' my own practice, that I would write it up and share it with a wider audience. But difference and context in the end meant that I worked with teachers for curriculum change, but I tackled the second-order research alone.

Therefore I cannot claim the existence of a critical community of researchers, especially if one differentiates between 'participation' and 'involvement':

> *Authentic participation* in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualised, practised and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership — responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practice. Mere involvement implies none of this; and creates the risk of co-option and exploitation of people in the realisation of the plans of others (author's emphasis, McTaggart, 1989, p. 3).

On this basis, it would seem that teachers were *participants* in the process of curriculum change, but only *involved* in the process of my own research.

This raises the question, then, as to whether my own research can be considered emancipatory action research. On the one hand there is evidence in my research for a concern with the connections between schooling and society, for improvement in practice, and for the involvement of all participants in the process of change. Yet, because I went to great lengths to support teachers and to build relations of trust under demanding conditions, it made it difficult for me to challenge for example, the ways in which teachers justified their own oppressive relations with their pupils. For this reason, my relationship with teachers was more akin to solidarity.

If one further accepts that emancipatory action research is crucially a *collaborative* process, as Kemmis and McTaggart (1988a) claim, then while the process of changing practice was 'collaborative, my research on that process was not. Research requiring individual

academic effort (and reward) is, in any case, in potential conflict with this ideal (Groundwater-Smith, 1988).

Moreover, Gore warns that even action research which aspires to be 'emancipatory' can function to regulate and control. She points to its underpinning in critical social science's modernist discourse of enlightenment and progress through knowledge (see especially Carr and Kemmis, 1986 and Grundy, 1987). This discourse itself functions as a politics of truth in which knowledge is seen to control power, and where the intellectual is accorded a central role in social transformation. Moreover, she argues, it encapsulates universalised notions of oppression and emancipation:

> [Emancipatory action research] tends to be presented in ways which assume emancipatory rather than regulative effects. I want to emphasise that there is nothing inherent to action research that makes it emancipatory. As evidence consider how smoothly action research has been appropriated into other traditions of teacher education. The claim that such appropriations are not 'real action research' demonstrate one's own will to knowledge and desire for control over the boundaries of action research discourse. 'Action research', the term given to a particular set of practices, never did exist outside of its practice. Such attempts to separate claims of what *is* action research from how it functions, ironically deny what *is* (1991, p. 48).

Thus emancipatory action research (even when connected to values of social justice and equity) may well have effects of domination through self-regulation and self-surveillance, not least in requiring

teachers to 'confess' and subjecting them to the normalizing gaze of Others.

In the end, I must acknowledge that my aspiration to emancipatory praxis and emancipatory action research was not realised, and perhaps could not have been under prevailing conditions. Yet I do also now understand that teacher educators cannot stand outside relations of power-knowledge, and ongoing reflexivity is needed about what we do, how we do it, and why we do it, and through critique to challenge 'what is', reversing where we can the effects of dominant power relations and reconstructing new forms:

> [Critique] doesn't have to be the premise of deduction which concludes: this is then what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in the process of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in programming. It is a challenge directed to what is. (Foucault, 1981 quoted in Smart 1983, p. 135-136).

What counts as 'research'?

Setting aside for now the issue of whose rules legitimate and determine acceptance of what counts as research, action research arguably 'pushes at the boundaries of who can be said to be a researcher and what the nature of research ought to be' (Noffke, 1991, p. 57).

The project's original intention had been to evaluate teacher action research, and I wrestled over three years with what this meant in practice. In the pilot study in 1987 the language and practice of

action research had not been a key feature of work with teachers, although there was some promising teacher reflection on practice. At school meetings in 1988, I emphasised the idea of teachers as researchers, saying things like 'through researching your own practice, through investigating what happens in your classroom you can become a better teacher, a more critical and creative teacher' (field notes, 27/1/88). But given constraints of context, teaching culture, and skill the focus of my work was much more in the area of changing methods and supporting teachers in making these changes.

This still leaves unresolved the question of what counts as 'research'. Stenhouse is clear about what he would define as research: 'systematic enquiry made public' (1981, p. 9). Elliott (1985) emphasises the need for teachers to publicise their findings in order to be regarded as teacher researchers, while Ebbutt (1985) claims that the distinguishing feature of action research is making teachers' reports open to public critique. McNiff (1988) claims that it is teachers' making public their claims to knowledge that defines their classroom enquiries as research. Finally, Stuart distinguishes between 'reflection in action' and 'action research':

> Through action research teachers are helped to make the process [reflection in action] more conscious, more explicit, and more rigorous to the point where, if made available for public critique and discussion, it can be called research (1991, p. 149).

Essentially the former would involve individual professional development, the latter a contribution to public knowledge.

Using the criteria of Stenhouse, Stuart and others I would claim that my own study qualifies as *research* in its contribution to a shared body of public knowledge about educational theorising, practice and research methodology. Further, as action research should, it has developed my own practical wisdom (Elliott, 1989) of educational change, and how to work democratically in my particular situation with teachers. On this basis I claim to know my own educational development.

Nonetheless, Ashton *et al.* (1989) conclude that the positions outlined above seem 'to imply a concept of research far removed from that of teachers simply enquiring more systematically into their practice' (1989, p. 14). This is compounded if one emphasises 'public scrutiny' of *written* reports, and it is then becomes difficult to argue that teachers in PREP did 'action research'.

What was a research project for me, was a curriculum development project for teachers, offering resources, expertise, and support. Nonetheless, what teachers did articulate, albeit unevenly, when interviewed at different times in the course of the project, was a view of themselves as reflective, flexible learners who were engaged in improving their teaching, a view which is arguably integral to developing action research and a culture which supports rather than subverts change. For example, teachers said things like:

- If you cannot evaluate yourself, you won't know if you are a good teacher or not (Bulelwa Kgase interview 20/10/89).
- I know it's not an easy thing to use the [new] methods perfectly, you know, 100% from the word go, but if you take them and use them you will see how they work and then afterwards, you

are going to evaluate them ... you are going to improve by using your own thinking (Gladstone Mashiyi, interview, 28/9/88).

- When I think about researching my own practice I found that faults with regards to methods can be rectified or old methods can be changed and the new ones can be adapted to, and my attitude when presenting the lesson to the pupils, their reaction when they receive the information from me. Is it stimulating or the other way around? And the improved way of teaching (David Bangeni, interview, 5/5/88).
- As a teacher I think you must not stand at one point, you must change as times change. Education does not stop. That's what I'm discovering. (Beatrice Dlamini, interview, 11/10/89).
- I was just a self-centred somebody. I just go to my classroom, I teach, I go out, I go home. Now I've discovered that, no! You must go to other people, to other teachers. And you must also give help to other teachers (Veronica Khumalo, interview, 17/10/89).
- At times you are just given methods [at the college] — when doing this lesson you can apply this. But when it comes to the practical situation, it's difficult and I think you have to be somebody flexible to be able to change that method when you see, no, the kids don't follow you and quickly change it (Ruth Ndude, interview, 30/9/88).
- I think what Melanie put across to us was teachers researching their own teaching, with maybe UCT providing us with materials, or the teachers themselves trying to develop the methods that would be helpful to them and help the kids, and the teachers growing in their teaching (Cynthia Bengu, interview, 22/11/89).

Thus, midway through the project I began rather to conceptualise a continuum from reflection to research, rather than a sharp dichotomy between these two activities. I expressed it this way in conversation with a UCT colleague:

> I still have questions about whether what the teachers are doing can be labelled research, or whether it doesn't matter, and it's only my problem of definition because I'm too locked into what constitutes an academic view of research. At the same time, I'm aware that teachers are not being very rigorous in looking at classroom evidence because they don't have the time or perhaps the research skills. So I wonder if we shouldn't rather call our approach 'reflection on action' or 'reflective conversation' which would be a step along a continuum from research to reflection (field notes 3/8/88).

All points of engagement along the continuum thus contributed to professional development, but not research development.

Yet this conceptualisation needs revisiting in so far as the continuum serves problematically (perilously?) to soften the boundary between 'esoteric' and 'everyday' knowledge (Bernstein, cited in Muller and Taylor, 1994) by assuming 'a radical equality of worlds of discourse' (Muller and Taylor, 1994, p. 8). It assumes that such boundaries are exclusionary and must be removed (see Muller and Taylor, 1994). In this view moves along the continuum are relatively unproblematic and a matter of personal choice only, rather than positioning in discourse and structural and institutional conditions of possibility. The same criticism might also be levelled

at the writers cited earlier, who classify research in terms of making reports public and writing reports.

Following Bernstein's argument it is not that simple to cross the line from reflection to research. Research criteria and standards in the academy have been constructed historically, and these 'rules for legitimation ... reflect the relative positions of particular groups in society' (Noffke, 1990, p. 57), and teachers as we know are posi-tioned as knowledge reproducers in relation to academics, the knowledge producers. Thus, argue Muller and Taylor, the 'boun-dary bashers unwittingly connive at their own marginalisation' (1994, p. 11) by those who have the power (the academy say, in relation to teachers; or traditional educational research in relation to action research) to classify where the line should be drawn. Rather, they suggest, the issue is one of enabling 'prudent boundary crossing' (1994, p. 11) of the space between exclusive domains of discursive activity.

Theirs is a complex paper and in touching on it here I may well be subjecting it to symbolic violence. Still, it seems that there is here a line of thought to which those committed to critical action research and the involvement of teachers in educational research ought to pay careful attention. It certainly presents an intriguing and challenging argument for further exploration in new INSET projects. To this end I want to quote them, some at length:

> To repeat: to cross the line without knowing it is to be at the mercy of the power inscribed in the line. The question is how to cross and that, we have suggested, means paying detailed attention to the politics of redescription, to the means required for a successful crossing. This is not to say that we accept the line as legitimate, merely that the battle

> cannot be won by trying to erase it discursively. If the best way to cross the border turns out to be by taking the correct documents, the warrantable social or cultural capital, no matter how socially contested these may be, then the progressive strategy consists in finding out how to empower people by ensuring they have the wherewithal to cross the border safely (1994, p. 12).

Thus academic knowledge is different from everyday knowledge and this would include academic knowledge about educational theory and practices and academic knowledge about research production, compared to the folk wisdom of teaching (everybody knows how to teach because we have all been to school argument). The issue here is what kind of disabling rather than empowering effects might INSET work have which 'crosses the line by acting as though the border were not there' (Muller and Taylor, 1994, p. 12)? As I understand this argument, the issue is to take care in what we describe as research. If we choose to label limited classroom enquiries or reflective teaching in this way for strategic reasons (for example in order to reconstruct perceptions of the intellectual role of teachers) then both teacher educators and teachers need to be conscious of what is at stake, what is being described, and how this 'research' is different from esoteric forms. Nor should this mean not challenging the academy's rules as to what counts as research, or whether even when we have the 'correct documents' we may still be excluded on the basis of gender (or race, or class). Here I find Noffke's question central: 'What ought research to look like if its purposes and forms are to be truly educational?' (1991, p. 55) Who in the end benefits from ours and others educational research?

Whose problems do we try to understand? Who speaks to and for whom? Who writes and who is written?

Moreover, the concept of prudent boundary crossing seems also to resonate with the difference between teachers picking up on new ways of teaching in quite superficial and ritualised ways, divorced from goals of the theoretical understanding of the principles that inform these moves. This is teaching as 'bricolage' (Hatton, 1988; Dowling, 1993), that is a discarding of theoretical explanations in favour of an ad hoc, non-analytical search for everyday explanation and 'what works'.

Here I wish briefly to revisit the argument presented in the introduction that theory-based action research takes us beyond common sense, interrogates experience rather than merely romanticising it, runs against the grain of our familiar discourses. How as Britzman (1991) says, do we recognise and name empirical observations which escape or exceed our existing frameworks? How do we know what we know? How do we know what we do not know? How are teachers to become more than bricoleurs (even apparently successful ones?) The way forward lies in theory for research and practice in so far as theory makes available the principles for alternative methodologies:

> The development of theory has always been necessary as a guide to research, a lens through which one interprets, that sets things apart and pulls things together. But theory is essential for practical implementation as well (Brown, 1994, p. 8).

In similar vein, Rudduck conceptualises three levels of commitment to change and equity policies. She describes these as:

- the level of heightened individual awareness
- the level of organisational coherence
- the level of analytic coherence (1994, p. 118).

The third level she sees as contributing to developing schooling which has more self-conscious social and political objectives, recognising the social and economic grounding of inequalities: 'It means looking beyond the short-term successes and understanding the tight weave of structures that hold inequality in place. Such understanding is not easy to achieve' (1994, p. 122).

Learning to teach in new and unfamiliar ways and taking on the challenge of esoteric knowledge is very hard and we expect a great deal of teachers when we ask them to engage with this knowledge so that they might 'create and sustain environments that foster thought, thought about powerful ideas' (Brown, 1994, p. 11). Faced with the strenuous road of analytic awareness and competence, the danger lies in a 'hybridising' (Muller and Taylor, 1994) and 'flattening' of action research in our commitment to a 'democratic' research method, and in doing so neutralising its emancipatory potential. Joan Cock's question resonates for me in capturing the problem:

> Can a militant oppositional effort be sparked by complex, not simple ideas? Or is the power of simple ideas a necessary stimulus to rebellion? Is disillusionment, then — when life is ultimately found to be complicated, not simple — rebellion's necessary end? (1989, p. 6).

Yet, as with developing new readings of teaching practice, only engagement with educational research opens up the possibility of access to educational research discourses for teachers, to challenge

what counts as research, not by removing the boundary, but, following Muller and Taylor (1994) by enabling acquisition of the travel documents to cross safely.'

Is action research an appropriate model for INSET in South Africa?

I would still argue that action research underpinned by a view of teachers as reflective practitioners (Schon, 1987) is *one* appropriate model for INSET in South Africa. Two further qualifications are needed, however. The first is that more rigorous and sustained research efforts, including the writing of reports, need to be supported by changed working conditions, including structural and political change, and a teaching culture which welcomes and values innovation, making available a new position of 'researcher' to teachers. The former may well be quickly put in place by a new government, the latter is likely to be slower and more difficult to realise.

For the teachers in PREP there were real constraints under prevailing historical conditions in implementing a model of action research similar to that developed in the Ford Teaching Project. We battled to find the cracks and the spaces in the dominant teaching culture to develop reflective curriculum practice, let alone action research. Like Stuart in Lesotho, I found that research skills were not easily acquired. Research training, under the conditions described earlier in this paper, was an impossibility. However, this is less an issue of methodological transfer, and more a question of the specificity of the conditions that support the development of action research, not least the conditions of access to esoteric knowledge.

The question is, does one wait for the culture to change, or intervene to help bring about, with teachers, the conditions that support reflective practice and action research?

The second point relates to a debate counterposing what is described as vocational and academic education. In essence this involves the argument for widespread vocational skilling in South Africa now, versus the longer term need for flexibility and transferable skills (Wolpe, 1991). Choices for one or the other must in turn be formulated 'from the concrete conditions of the society and the development strategies which may be appropriate to transform those conditions' (Wolpe 1991, p. 11). Thus under present conditions of teacher development one might argue the more urgent need for the mass implementation of narrowly tailored training schemes for teachers. Indeed, as I noted earlier, the importance of technical skills in teacher development cannot be dismissed. Action research in the short term therefore is perhaps unlikely to be the dominant model of INSET.

Nonetheless, I would also argue that the longer term development of a post-apartheid society demands a more flexible and reflective view of teaching practice, and one which acknowledges and explores in practice the values that inform our educational work. Models of INSET, such as that of action research therefore need also to be developed alongside other forms. Arguably, too, it is this latter model of professional practice that will contribute to developing quality primary education as a national development goal in the longer term.

In my view, there are further arguments for action research in Southern contexts suggested by my own study. Firstly, action

research encourages local curriculum development rather than the unreflective adoption of models and practices constructed elsewhere. Secondly, action research studies by teachers and teacher educators can provide textured portrayals of the processes of implementation, including as my own study shows, the unintended consequences of change. As yet, in South Africa we mostly lack fine-grained descriptions of everyday realities, whether of classroom interaction, or in-service development. Thirdly, action research builds on the capabilities of effective educational practice — skills of observation, of critical self-evaluation, and so on. Fourthly, although fragmented and much changed by the processes flowing out of advent of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century, African communities retain links to an oral tradition, inherent in which are skills such as listening and interviewing.

In the end, Northern and Southern researchers need be wary of claiming one right way to do action research, or some essentializing form. Forms of action research, and the limits and possibilities for educational reform are always historically specific and contingent. Nonetheless, through comparative local accounts, we can read interpretations of possibility in terms of a shifting dynamic of action research in different places and times by different people. Thereby, we enrich our own understanding of the conditions for action research as a method for the production of educational transformation.

Concluding thoughts

Schooling in South Africa is still a turbulent affair, and action research and new teaching methods may not seem to be a particularly dramatic starting point. Nor would I claim that my own

action research or teachers' reflective practice had any immediate or widely felt effect on the problems of schooling or society. Teachers worked to improve aspects of their classroom practice and to produce better lessons. This did not constitute curriculum transformation, and could not, without articulation with broader political struggles, challenge and overturn massive inequalities. Teachers acting mostly alone, mostly in isolation cannot change schools, and improving teaching cannot be the entire agenda for educational transformation. Under new conditions of possiblity, INSET and action research projects need to take on Rudduck's three levels of commitment: personal, organisational[1] and analytical/ political. Moreover, a major silence in my own work was that around gender – at the time the questions of race and class seemed (were) overwhelming – but examining the nature of gendered discourse in school is a critical area for further work.

In the end, success is relative. Teachers with whom I worked were empowered, even if less by action research than by reflective curriculum development. There were changes in classrooms, and a barrier between the white university researcher and the African school teachers was breached, even though cross-cultural problems of race, language and communication continued. Despite such difficulties, one might argue here too that change has to start somewhere.

For my own part, the attraction of action research lies still in the never-ending spiral of action, reflection, inquiry and theorising arising from and grounded in my practical concerns. The search is not so much for the right answers but towards 'practical wisdom ... in particular, complex and human situations' (Elliott, 1991, p. 52), a process 'of becoming, a time of formation and tranformation, of

scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become' (Britzman, 1991, p. 8).

Notes

1 It is not my intention to examine the literature on whole school development. Suffice to note that this version of INSET is still problematic if abstracted from a social context. Moreover, it is often underpinned by a consensus view of development which may well be derailed when inevitable conflicts surface. Sufficient for my purpose here to point to Rudduck's notion of a whole school policy as 'transforming a collection of organisationally coordinated individuals and groups into a body whose shared values define the conditions of membership and the integrity of common practice' (1994, p. 4).

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